

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Lester Mengel (Smiley) - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:35 **Can you give us an introduction to your life story?**

My name is Lester Ray Mengel. I'm born on the 10th February 1951, a little place called Clifton up on the Darling Downs there. I come from a family of two, just my brother and I. We lived on the Darling Downs, or at Clifton for a little while

01:00 before we moved to Gatton. My father, at a very young age, I was only two at that stage, divorced my mother, so she was more or less empowered to raise my brother and I. Those days, going back into the '50s and the early '60s, she found it quite difficult and she could only raise one of us. I ended up going out to Goondiwindi

01:30 to live with my uncle and be raised by him, which I have no regrets whatsoever. I have no animosity against my Mum because I fully understood that. They were times when you couldn't survive as a family and she done the best thing possible. So I had no regrets whatsoever. My early schooling days I went to Gatton State School in my younger days

02:00 before I went to Goondiwindi to live with my uncle. Out of Goondiwindi, I enjoyed my time out there with my uncle. He more or less became my father. Very strict man. Sunday school every Sunday, and I'm not saying I'm not a religious person, but I used to buck and kick and fight for that. There were good things about Goondiwindi in those days was the fishing.

02:30 After a while I moved back to Brisbane with my Mum. She left Gatton and moved to Brisbane and remarried. Then I started my high school. I'm one of the original founding members, student wise, at Coorparoo College as we know it today. I'm still waiting on my invitation to go back there for their reunion one day. However, I didn't

03:00 like school. I done Grade 8 and thought, "No, that's enough for me", and so I left at the end of Year 8 and I went back out with my uncle to Goondiwindi, where I became a telegram boy with the postmaster general. That only lasted a short period of time. Reason being I was looking for an apprenticeship, and then my uncle was a baker so I started an apprenticeship as a baker. I didn't

03:30 complete the apprenticeship because I just found that there was nothing challenging for me. I didn't know what I wanted. I think because I lived with him for so long in my early years, I went back out there, there was just nothing challenging for me out there. So I left and I went back to Brisbane. Again I got myself a job. I started as a French polisher.

04:00 Went and joined the army reserve and the employer in those days wouldn't sign his side of the enlistment form to say he would support the army reserve. So I said, "OK, no worries." So at that stage one of my goals was joining the police force. We're talking about '68 at that stage,

04:30 so I was only 16 at that stage. On my 17th birthday, for about two days after my 17th birthday I went into Roma Street, which is entirely different today, and had my medical and all that sort of stuff. So I had it all, had my aptitude test and I failed punctuation. Believe it or not, that's all I failed, punctuation. They had a little paragraph where you've got to put the dots and exclamation marks and question marks and I

05:00 failed. So I wasn't accepted. Again, in those days my mother was working at a little café in Mary Street. After that I was pretty dejected and down and so forth, so I said, "I'll go and see Mum and I'll go home with her." I'm walking past Mary Street and the army, navy and air force recruiting was there. I thought, "OK, police don't want me, I'll go in and see who wants me in the forces." So I walked down and I said,

05:30 "Who would like me?" The army said, "Why? What are you looking for?" I said "I'm looking for a career in the services." So come the 21st April 1968 I enlisted into the Australian regular army as a young, 17 plus a couple of months. Then I was sent off to sunny Kapooka, or some call it sunny, where in

06:00 those days, we had a mixture of national servicemen and regular army. I was regular army. I volunteered to join the army, I wasn't a national serviceman. I got on very well with the national service people. So I spent 13 weeks down there and those were the days that the medicals were very strict. The doctor took one look at me dental wise and said, "Lester, all your

06:30 teeth have got to come out on the top." I go, "What?" So fair enough, and they took all my top teeth out, because eating lollies wasn't a good thing. From there I was allocated to the infantry corps. That was my first preference. I thought infantry was probably the best place to go. So we went to Singleton, where we spent another 12 weeks there being taught the basic principles of how to

07:00 be a soldier in war. Especially an infantry soldier. During that time there I made some good friends. However, because of my age, I was allocated to the 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, who just returned from Vietnam at the end of 1968. So because those days the age to serve overseas was

07:30 19, not as compared today where it's as low as the age of 18. So I went to Townsville, which positions I was trained in up there. I was a rifleman and so I ended up with all my qualifications for the Carl Gustaf, the 186 recoilless and all the sort of stuff. Then I was asked whether I was interested in becoming a forward scout.

08:00 I didn't think much of it and I said, "Yeah, I'll give forward scout a go", because I just had the philosophy with life, and I still do today at some 53 years, that when your number's up, your number's up. I looked at it that there were more people being killed in Australia than what there were actually in Vietnam. So I done all the necessary training, which was required to do visual tracking and things like that up in Mount Spec in the rainforest with the type

08:30 of terrain we were looking at prior to going to Vietnam. Those were the days when we would walk from the Lavarack Barrack up to high range, some 30-40 kilometres up the range, do our exercise for maybe three, four, five weeks and then we'd walk back again. It was luxury to have the trucks to take us up.

09:00 So after those couple of years of training, in May or 1970, my company, I was in Alpha Company, we were deployed to Vietnam as the early advance party. We flew over Pan-Am [Pan American Airways], which was very nice because we had limited free beer, but it was very nice to

09:30 have that. We arrived in Tan Son Nhut airport, which is in Saigon. It probably at that stage, really was a bit of an eye opener for me. Being an Australian, living in Australia, I'd never ever seen poverty and I'd never ever seen people begging for food. We were all on cut lunches and then we were sitting down at Tan Son Nhut airport waiting for another

10:00 American Hercules to take us out to Nui Dat, which was going to be our home for the next some 12 months. Then we had people begging food and we were pretty naïve, well I was anyway, and taking for granted what we were given, nice sandwiches and apples and so forth. I just looked at it and, "I don't need this", and threw it in a bin and all of a sudden you had anything up to half a dozen kids fighting for

10:30 that lunchbox. After a while we picked up our weapons, allocated onto a Hercules, and then we were flown out to Nui Dat and then we were deployed into our home for the next 12 months. Prior to starting all our exercises and patrols and so forth, we had to be acclimatised, so we

11:00 spent three to four weeks just doing small patrols, some tail patrols, standing patrol, working with APCs, just getting used to the climate, the terrain, the people and also getting used to the APC, Army [actually Armoured] Personnel Carriers, and what they would be required to do if we were attacked and things like that. So after we completed that, our first big

11:30 patrol that we went out on was that we were going out for six weeks and we were going to be working the Nui Thai Vais which was round Baria there. What happened was we all boarded onto trucks and we got dropped off on the northern side of Baria and we were ready then to shake out in formation and move up and clear a lot of the stuff.

12:00 So we done that and we done our six weeks. We were pretty quiet. We didn't find too much on that first operation. However one of the other companies picked up a couple of tax collectors and so forth. So that was a pretty quiet operation. So we went back to Nui

12:30 Dat and then after that again, we went on what they call R&R [Rest and Recreation] into Vung Tau, which was a place where you just go and have a good time. Real socially and with drinking and so forth. We got on pretty well with the Americans, mainly the Negroes, because we walked into one of their clubs and, "Aussie, come, we'll buy you a beer". So that was

13:00 pretty good. So went back to, that was only for two days, the third day we were sent back to Nui Dat. Then we'd spend probably the next week just preparing for the next operation, which probably was cleaning our ammunition, cleaning our weapons and re-kitting our gear if some of it was faulty. Then this time we went out through

13:30 back to Baria, but this time we went through Hoa Long up to the Horseshoe and patrolled up around the villages up around that area for the next couple of weeks. Then came back, did the same process again, we had a couple of days off. This next operation was probably where my nightmare started. It's still haunting me today, pretty

- 14:00 bad. In regards to, A Company was allocated back to the Nui Thai vice and we got off the trucks again and our platoon was given the point and my platoon commander in those days was Lieutenant Petrie. My section commander was the well renowned "Toad" Dunshea, which was quite a popular figure in the army in the
- 14:30 '70s, '80s and '90s. I was given the point [forward scouting position]. We had no sooner shook out and we heard a shot. A shot was fired at me, because you can hear a bullet when it passes by you. So we went down, went into our normal positions for as if we were going to assault or whatever the case be, but there was only one shot fired. So after some time of
- 15:00 working out where it came from, we thought it was probably just a farmer just getting one off. So we continued on. We were working up in the Nui Thai vice, probably for a week, week and a half. 3 Platoon was working independently to the rest of the company. We harboured up one night and I was given the lead of the section again and I was number one scout. So we started patrolling
- 15:30 these tracks that we had set up some ambushes on and some listening posts and so forth. So after a while we patrolled and then I came across what I thought was a cave, which it turned out to be. So I gave the enemy signal because I knew it wasn't us that was there. We went to ground, the section commander came
- 16:00 up. We had a look and from that stage we started to conduct a search of the cave. Within the cave we found rations and ammunition. We also found a fireplace that wasn't that cold. So we knew they'd been there that night. So after we'd done what we were required to do, we moved out.
- 16:30 I led out again and at that stage we were probably about 25 meters out from where the cave was. I just don't know why it came about, but I looked down at my left foot and I can't explain it, but I just did and I saw a broken twig.
- 17:00 A broken twig set up a certain way means set up mine signals and things like that. So I propped and just stood still, gave the mine signal. Then at that stage I'd just realised that I was some millimetres from standing on a mine which we know as the Jumping Jack with the
- 17:30 three prongs. So that shook me a fair bit. What we done, we had an ex-Vietcong who turned good-guy patrolling with us. He came up and showed us, cleaned the leaves out from around the three prongs, showed me where it was. Then what we done was just backtracked out
- 18:00 of where we were and went back up to the hill where we had been the night previous. What we done, we brought in engineers to dig the mine up and destroy it. Prior to us moving we put up the mine sign and all that sort of stuff. So the next day I was asked to take the engineers down, our section where the mine was. We did
- 18:30 that, however, when we got there we found that the mine had been dug up. They'd either been watching us and saw us and saw what we'd do and things like that. So probably that second night I was going through a lot of what if stage. What if I was a couple of seconds slower, what if, and it really started to affect me a fair bit. My psychological
- 19:00 side of it started to play a bit of havoc with me. So I spoke to my section commander and he put me back in for a little while with the rifle group. I thought I still wasn't coping at all. This was still playing a lot of havoc on me. So the patrol finished up. We ended up going back to Nui Dat and it was at that
- 19:30 stage where I'd seen a doctor and from that stage on I was then taken out of the rifle platoon and I was allocated to the headquarters of 187, 1st Australian Task Force headquarters transporter company where I was to work as a member of a three person defoliation team. Defoliation team is what a
- 20:00 lot of people hear today as Agent Orange. It's a team where we spray this chemical. We mix it, spray it off the back of the truck and it kills the grass and all that sort of stuff that's growing in between the wire around Nui Dat. At that stage we didn't know much about the chemicals. We said, "Here's the truck", we were given tasks on a daily basis. Because of
- 20:30 the chemicals used, the truck spent a lot of time off the road so we could do other driving tasks and so forth where we might take water out to the fire support bases and things like that. After a while, after about six months of doing this, I was requested to go back to the battalion. Sorry, prior to that, on the defoliation team, we were
- 21:00 requested to go with D and E Platoon, which is part of the platoon that protects task force headquarters. We were going out on APCs with a Centurion tank escort to destroy these rice paddies. They thought the defoliant we had was the best way of doing it. Probably about the second day we were out there, we'd come across an obstacle crossing where the tanks and the APCs
- 21:30 couldn't cross. What they had to do was deploy the tank bridge. So I had a Centurion beside the APC that I was on, just providing protection. There was another APC that was coming up between my APC and the centurion. They ended up hitting a mine. It had D and E Platoon members on it. The mine was so big that it picked up the

- 22:00 APC and sat it on the back end of the Centurion tank. Out of that, all of the D&E Platoon members allocated to the APC were sitting on top and they all suffered back injuries. The two crew I remember seeing the driver of the APC being actually thrown up into the air and he came down in between the two covers that protect
- 22:30 the motor. We have a metal cover and a wood cover. He was in between those. There was another, a Vietnamese person inside the tank, which had been well and truly mutilated in regards to the mine. That was probably 10 meters away from me. All I remember was I heard this ka-boom and being
- 23:00 showered in a lot of dirt, rocks and then seeing all these people laying down and so forth. After the choppers were brought in to medivac everybody and the wrecker brought in to remove the APC and all that sort of stuff, then we continued on and destroyed the rice paddies, but we didn't destroy them with the defoliant. What we actually done was placed drums of diesel in strategic
- 23:30 places and strapped explosive to it and blew it up. At the same time we burnt it totally. On our way back, it took a couple of days to get back, I'm sitting in my hootchie [plastic cape shelter] and I took my socks off and here I had was all my ten toenails were stuck to my socks. There was no pain, no blood, no nothing. So I went to the medico and he said, "That doesn't look good, Lester." So they
- 24:00 brought a chopper in and took me back to the medical centre at Nui Dat. The doctors had a look at it, they weren't too sure. I explained to them that I sprayed defoliant and the boots were defoliant. was 2, 4, 5, 2 and D [D445?]. I explained all that sort of stuff and he could only put it down to that was caused, but I still have that problems today. My toenail will
- 24:30 turn yellow, have a bit of an off smell and I've pretty well got it down to the right time now that I can just pull it off there's no pain, no nothing. I find it difficult today that the government don't recognise that the, I'll call it the Agent Orange, didn't affect us in any way. I differ a real lot on that, but that's my personal opinion. We went back to
- 25:00 Nui, well I was already back at Nui Dat. I ended up going back to my platoon. I done one operation with the platoon, it was only a short one, where we were just monitoring some houses that we thought were being visited by the VC, Vietcong. Our driver at that stage, our company driver actually, it's alleged he accidentally shot himself in the wrist.
- 25:30 Because I had a licence to drive a Landrover and truck, so I was allocated to become the company driver, which was good because after the episode of being shot at and the mine and then the APC blown up, I thought I'd had my three strikes. I'm also one of these people that, whether you call me a pessimist or an optimist or whatever you want, I believe three strikes and you're out. So, this job's going to suit me down
- 26:00 to a tee. So what we done was we came back to Nui Dat. So come June 1971 the battalion was ready to come home, so we were allocated HMAS Sydney in those days and we boarded the Sydney and we were dropped off in Townsville. For those people that watch this, I can assure you that a hammock does not take the swell
- 26:30 out of rough seas, first hand. I had never been so crook, seasick in my life as coming back on the Sydney. We arrived back and the battalion marched through Townsville and during that stage we were the first battalion to wear the infantry combat badge. One of the disturbing things that happened on our return from Vietnam was that we were showered
- 27:00 with paint, rotten eggs, tomatoes, labelled "baby-killers" and all that sort of stuff. That hurt a lot of us, because I don't believe that the public really understood really what we were doing over there. We were a peacekeeping force for the South Vietnamese government and that's all we saw it as. Then we arrived back at Lavarack barracks and they said, "Here's your plane ticket, we'll see you in six weeks." I remained
- 27:30 in the army till 1974 where Mr Gough Whitlam was voted in and he stopped Vietnam, stopped Malaya. We were the next battalion to go to Malaya for two years. I thought, "No". I didn't see much sense in remaining in the army any more because there was no challenges. So I got out of the army and then I went driving trucks for a while. Then I rejoined the army again in 1978
- 28:00 because, as you all know, Mr Whitlam was ousted. I got back in again. So I rejoined and today I'm still in, so far I've chalked up 33 years in the regular army and the Australian reserve army. I went from infantry to the Royal Australian Corps of Transport and now my current position within the defence force is that I'm the SO2 [Safety Officer?]
- 28:30 safety field management team and that position is, I answer directly to Major-General Evans for any risk management and safety issues that have to do with the division deploying on overseas operations or even training operations, even if it's a multinational force, I'm commanded by him. I have married. I have four children. My
- 29:00 eldest daughter, she's now 28. She's suffering severe Crohn's Disease, the next stage from that is prostrate cancer [?] for her. My second daughter, she's doing rather well. She graduates the 17th February 2004 as a lawyer. I've got my two sons which are still in high school at Grade 12 and

- 29:30 Grade 11. My civilian employment, since I got retired from the regular army I'm always referred to as in the reserves, in August 1993. I transferred over to the army reserve. In the army reserve, some of my postings, I was with the medical company based here in Townsville. I was
- 30:00 with the army personnel agency in Brisbane. The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] at Brisbane University regiment, and then I was promoted to captain on the 1st January 2003 and I took up my new position. My civilian employment is in the risk management workplace as a safety officer with the Caboolture council. I tell people that I'm very fortunate, I'm very lucky that I've been one of those people where
- 30:30 not only having one career in a lifetime, but I've had two. I've had the military and now I've fallen into workplace health and safety. I went to university when I got out. I now hold some 4 diplomas in risk management, safety, transport management, resource management and I thoroughly enjoy my job today.
- 31:00 **I'll take you back to the beginning now. Your dad divorced your mum when you were only two. Can you give us a picture of some of your earlier memories with your mum as a single parent?**
- It was,
- 31:30 I can probably remember being raised by, my grandfather lived with us in our house in Gatton. Mum always told my brother John and I that the reason that he has divorced Mum was that he believed my Mum had an affair, because my brother and I are like chalk and cheese. My two boys are like chalk and cheese too, so that was the reason why.
- 32:00 Mum's Dad passed away and then we had to move into the hotel that she was cooking at and that's where she couldn't really afford to have me there and that's when we came to the arrangement that I would go out to Goondiwindi to live. I was probably about ten at that stage. Probably one of the biggest things that lives in my memory today was that my Mum was so busy she sent me to school on a public holiday.
- 32:30 I've never ever forgot that. I went to school. I'm thinking, "There's no kids at school. There's something wrong." I went home and hid underneath the house all day until it was time for school to finish. So that was one thing, I was going to make sure my children were never going to be sent to school on a public holiday. Mum worked very tirelessly and hard for us. When I moved back from Goondiwindi we had a thing where we used
- 33:00 to save, a lot of people probably won't remember this, but threepences and sixpences those days. Then we used to go for holidays at Redcliffe. On that we used to catch the Redcliffe bus line, have a week at Redcliffe and go down. So that was our holidays. Mum remarried when I came back from Goondiwindi.
- 33:30 it wasn't a happy relationship. My brother in actual fact ended up having to stop our stepfather from hitting our mother. So he was an alcoholic that had been cured, however his brother came down from Goondiwindi, got back onto it again, came home drunk, so my brother ended up, because I was away,
- 34:00 he evicted him out of the flat. I used to get to school at Coorparoo. I remember I used to catch a tram at East Brisbane, get off at Stanley Street and catch a trolley bus from Stanley Street down to Coorparoo school. They were good days. My teens, I enjoyed my teen. I had a good mate, Adrian Acterburg [sp?]. We used to spend a lot of time
- 34:30 going to pictures at the old Capri, in those days with the old canvas seats. Regular basis for something to do, we used to wait till the tide was going out, we'd swim across Brisbane River from Mowbray Park, get out at the Youth Farm Park, walk all the way back up to the Story Bridge, dive in again and get out at Mowbray Park. That was our Sunday thing. We didn't have much TV those days because we used to just have so much to do.
- 35:00 Some of the things that I've done, like jumping off the main beams of the bridge into the McIntyre River at Goondiwindi, in my role as a safety officer today I don't condone that with the public litigation and all that sort of stuff. I look at kids doing that and it brings me back to my days, but I must chastise them. I say, "Look, you're not allowed to do that", and things like that.

**What was the Brisbane River like back then?**

- 35:30 There wasn't as many boats. Ships used to come all the way up those days. We used to have a fight with the old Miramar [?] that was going to Straddy [Stradbroke Island]. The captain used to get upset because we'd be diving off the piers and so forth and we'd be jumping around his boat and all that sort of stuff. But the Brisbane River was, I suppose we had no sense, no feeling. I'm sure there were sharks in there and so forth,
- 36:00 but I just think it was the same as what it was today. We used to fish there, catch good muddies and so forth.

**Was it blue or brown?**

Brown. I don't think I've ever seen the Brisbane River blue.

**You started at Gatton with your mum. When you were ten you moved to Goondiwindi with your uncle.**

36:30 Yes.

**You were there with him for...**

I was there until I finished Year 7. So that would have been probably three years. Then at that stage Mum had met this guy and they had a flat and I moved back to Brisbane to start high school. Instead of starting high school in Goondiwindi, I started high school in Brisbane.

**What about life at Goondiwindi?**

Life at Goondiwindi. I met my

37:00 first love there. I'll never forget her. Her name was Cheryl Brassington. She was my first kiss. So I was a very shy person, I still am today. A lot of people probably differ to that. She was a young lady that, she would take the bull by the horns so to speak, I'll say. If she wanted to kiss me, she would. I used to love that. I'll never ever

37:30 forget her. I'm not sure where she is today. I can remember where they lived just before the McIntyre Bridge there. Sneaking into their garage to meet her some nights, and her friends. I remember the open air picture theatre at Goondiwindi. My uncle, he's now passed away, but he was a very, I'll

38:00 always respect him and Auntie Kath for bringing me up. She's still alive today. Fishing was great.

**What fish did you catch in Goondiwindi?**

Out there we used to catch cod, yellow belly, and the jew and those pesky little things called turtle and European carp.

## Tape 2

00:32 **There's a mythology about Goondiwindi, like it's an outback posting. Have you come across that at all?**

No, you're right there. I think because Goondiwindi was so far out west that it was on the border of New South Wales and Queensland,

01:00 they used to amalgamate Goondiwindi and Boggabilla together because Boggabilla was just across the bridge five mile up the road so to speak. People used to say, "Where do you live?" and I'd say, "I'm mainly raised in Goondiwindi." "Goondiwindi? What did you do out there?" But I really enjoyed my time out there. I really did. Another thing comes to mind, while I was

01:30 out there while I was going to school out there. I was showing off one night and sewerage had just come to Goondiwindi, believe it or not and they were putting in these sewerage pipes. Safety wasn't well renowned those days and somehow I ended up in the pit on my pushbike anyway. I'll never forget that either.

**Were you showing off in front of girls?**

Of course. Young fellow those days. They thought

02:00 it was hilarious.

**Until you fell.**

Yes. Then I was so embarrassed and them of course made a big deal out of it, which I probably would have too in their situation. But I have nothing but fond memories of Goondiwindi.

**Did [your mum's brother] have children of his own?**

Uncle Ray and Auntie Kath were very staunch Catholics. They had

02:30 six kids. So I was the seventh one. I won't say adopted, but I was offered shelter under their roof. We had our ups and downs with all of us. I don't mind admitting Uncle Ray gave me a bit of a belting. Those were the days when you used to get the strap. I can remember before I went out to Goondiwindi I got caught underneath the

03:00 railway bridge at Gatton, as if I remember it, this is going probably late '50s. A mate and I were throwing mud at trains when they come passed and a police sergeant rocked up in the ute. He toed us up the backside, put us in the back of the ute, took us home and I can remember getting a belting from my grandfather with the strap and then Mum got home and I complained to her and I got the ironing cord. Never ever done it again.

03:30 It was only once, but I swore at my auntie, which I shouldn't have done. I was angry over something. So he dealt with it accordingly, which was my rear end was at the end of it.

**What about at school, did you get the cane?**

No. I was probably one of those goody two shoes, whereas at school

04:00 I wasn't a scholar. Education-wise I was a late bloomer. It wasn't till probably in my late 20s, early 30s I realise education was very important. I used to just potter along, just fall over the line so I wasn't going to get into strife. Teachers, I'll never forget Mr Honer, Dennis Honer. He used to drive a Volkswagen.

04:30 He used to use a little 3/4-inch dowel stick on us if we used to misbehave. That used to hurt something chronic. Those were the days when teachers could do that. Many times I remember board duster whistling passed my ears to hit somebody who wasn't paying attention, or chalk, or anything like that.

**Did the girls get the**

05:00 **dowel as well?**

No. They were all too goody two shoes. No, there was a couple of girls there, one in particular, she wore the feather duster because I remember she didn't do something, and anyway Mr Honer got up and had a go at her and she called him some very choice names that I can't repeat on this interview. He just left fly with the

05:30 dust board duster.

**When your father took off, did he or his family keep in touch with your mother and you and your brother?**

No. What happened there was that my brother went to a reunion. I was still in the army in those days.

06:00 I think I was over at Puckapunyal. He went to a reunion and was ostracised by his new family, which had grown up. They wouldn't talk to him. They were more or less passed off as the black sheep of the family. I've always had the feeling that if I ever saw him I'll be up front, I would smack him in the mouth because I don't

06:30 believe we were treated fairly by him. However, Judy, my wife, she's made some contacts now with some of the relatives. All the relatives except one is prepared to meet with us. The reason I say that is that

07:00 just prior to Christmas I've been diagnosed with cancer and one of the things we were trying to find out was, he's now passed away, and we need to find out what type of cancer he, why he passed away. He passed away with prostate cancer. So that now just adds another thing that we will need to explore with the cancer that I have, which

07:30 is in my stomach, in the oesophagus.

**I'm very sorry to hear that.**

No worries. Look, positive outlook. The specialist has said that hopefully the operation is successful and it will never, ever come back. So you've got to remain positive.

**Then it won't.**

That's right.

**What about seeing your mum? You went over to Goondiwindi when you were ten, how often did you**

08:00 **actually get to see your mother?**

Probably, if I was lucky, once a year. She would come out on holidays there. Some out on the old, what we called the Rattler. The train used to leave Roma Street used to go to Goondiwindi. Or, we had the bus. Those were the days where the road to Goondiwindi just prior to Inglewood was still out about 100 some mile of dirt, which wasn't very pleasant. The cars those days,

08:30 they were built like tanks. They weren't reliable, but were pretty good. It wasn't that often.

**Is your mum still alive?**

No, Mum passed away probably six years ago. No, eight years ago now. She had a series of strokes within a couple of weeks and was put into a nursing home and then she

09:00 just went downhill from there.

**It's wonderful to hear as far as your childhood goes that you don't have any resentment towards her. Did she ever mention to you that she felt guilty about having to do that, or if she was at peace with that?**

I think she was at peace with that. Reason being was, I was in the army at 17. I'm now 53, still in the army. I was

09:30 self-sufficient, so I would only come home on holidays, maybe three weeks of the year, four weeks, just to visit Mum. She never mentioned it. I never raised it because I looked at it that it never hurt me. It made me a better person, because Mum couldn't give me all that love, but I got it from Auntie Kath and Uncle Ray. I just hope, and I'm pretty sure, that

10:00 she was at peace with it. I'm sure she probably did feel guilty initially about having to do it, but those days a decision was made and it was the right one.

**It was so much harder for single mothers too.**

Especially trying to live in a hotel and cook three meals a day.

**She probably got harassed a little bit by the blokes that were there at the pub.**

I've always said that she's

10:30 had a hard life and what I done was to help her in her declining years was that I owned a house in Gatton and we gave it to her rent free. Then we would just pay the rates and all that sort of stuff. That was more as my gift to her for raising my brother and I at a very difficult time. John's turned out to be a fabulous guy. None of us have

11:00 been in, had problems with the police. Well, I won't say significant problems, I got caught at Singleton when I was going through Ingleburn. A mate and I jumped the train failing to pay a fare and we got caught and we admitted it, we owned up. It was ironic, two days before we were ready to fly out to Vietnam I got the summons from the New South Wales court from the Queensland police and the policeman just said, "Write a letter just to say that 'Yes, I

11:30 plead guilty. I'm deploying to Vietnam.'" And I never heard anything from it. And John got caught wagging school.

**Are you still in close contact with your brother?**

My brother and I, yes. We're trying to make amends. I say make amends, I don't mean it in the sense that we had a falling out or anything, but I left him more or less to look after Mum at that delicate years when she went from one home to another.

12:00 I wasn't very supportive because I couldn't, because I was so far away. So now we're making up amends now in regards to getting back to our brother-brother relationship, which we never had. He joined the army for a small period of time. But it wasn't his cup of tea.

**As long as people are still alive there's opportunities for things isn't there?**

Definitely.

12:30 **Growing up, were you trained to use a gun?**

No. I used it shooting rabbits, however I really didn't get to use guns until I joined the army. Those stages, when I joined the army, we had SLRs [Self-loading rifles] those days and the M60 machinegun, which was my favourite weapon, which

13:00 I don't admit I was very good at. But I was too light to be a machine gunner, so that's why I wasn't offered the job before we went to Vietnam. My policy on guns today, I don't believe in them. Only for people that require them for lifestyle, I believe in the legislation. I also believe that we're only keeping the honest people honest.

13:30 You see today the amount of shooting happening down in New South Wales. My boys, my eldest son, Jason, he approached me on the weekend and said, "Dad, I'd like to join the pistol club." He turned 17 in May. Now I'm thinking about letting him join the pistol club because I think because it's under a very, very controlled environment. It's also, the Queensland police services use the pistol range here at Caboolture.

14:00 They've been bugging me for years and years to do skirmish. I wouldn't let him use skirmish because...

**Is that the paint?**

Yes, that's the paint one.

**Apparently that hurts.**

Yeah, well they are saying that, but they're also saying that the new one now is all laser activated. So I'm relenting at old age, but I'm prepared to let him have a go. I'll probably join him too. For

14:30 a bit of fun with the boys.

**There's a big difference between a controlled environment and handing someone a gun.**



Yes, definitely.

**Growing up in the late '50s, early '60s, all the mods came in and the**

Rockers,

15:00 surfers.

**Beach Boys were later, weren't they?**

They were coming in that era.

**Did that hit Goondiwindi?**

Well, not to the extent it was in Brisbane when I got down to Brisbane. More or less, in Goondiwindi, a lot of the people lived on properties so they have cowboys and jeans and hats and so forth. But in Brisbane, I don't

15:30 mind admitting I was a rocker. I used to have heaps of Brylcreem in my hair, as I had hair those days. I won't say long hair, but reasonable hair. Nice blue silk shirts, studded belt, tight jeans and pointed shoes. That's the way we used to get around. We used to have a motto, on a weekend we used to punch a surfie. That was our thing. But I wasn't into the punching the surfie bit, but I don't mind admitting I was a rocker.

16:00 A lot of people will probably remember Rock 'n' Roll George that used to cruise up Queen Street. Well, sometimes we'd cruise with him in those early days.

**Who did you cruise with?**

Rock 'n' Roll George. He used to drive the old FJ Holden. He used to have the aerials and the foxtail hanging off the aerials of his car. Not heard of it? OK.

**Rocker George was an Australian bloke?**

Yeah. He lived in Brisbane.

16:30 Rock 'n' Roll George. They still refer to him today on B105 from time to time, about how he used to cruise the streets in his FJ for chicks.

**What were you taking off? Was that an American or British thing, the rocker thing coming to Australia?**

I was just following the leader. I'm not sure.

**What kind of music was it?**

Just Rock 'n'

17:00 Roll.

**Johnny O'Keefe?**

Yeah, all those. Like Tony Woolsey, for those who remember. I can remember meeting him down in Mowbray Park because he lived up the road from us. Heavy Rock 'n' Roll.

**That would mean dancing as well?**

Oh yeah.

**Was that the jitterbug and things like that?**

No, this was Rock 'n' Roll like, you see, "Rock Around the Clock" and all that sort of stuff. Then

17:30 we used to get into boogying.

**So you'd actually get to dance with girls?**

Oh yeah.

**You were shy, is that why you got into dancing?**

No, probably because, again, my mate, those days I was a follower. Mate would say, "Come on, we're going up to the dance", so I'd say, "All right". So we used to catch two trams to get to the dance up at Coorparoo.

18:00 I can't think of the church up there but they used to have a regular young people dances up there. So we used to go there. Ask girls for a dance. It used to take a lot of thought, to get up and ask a girl for a dance.

**How long would it take you? A couple of dances or until the end of the night?**

It was the end of the night. Pluck the courage up. I used to sit there and see if somebody was sitting there by themselves, feeling the way I was, and that's the lady

18:30 for the dance. I was a chicken, I don't mind admitting it. Today - now I'm married, I don't have to worry about that!

**So you went for the wallflowers?**

Yes. The wallflowers. I never thought of it that way. I was probably a male wallflower. I must remember that. As you can see today, I'm not as

19:00 shy as I was in those days. I've come out of my eggshell.

**From a female perspective I haven't thought about how difficult it would be to ask somebody to dance.**

It's very difficult.

**What about at Christmas time in Goondiwindi, was that a time where you look back with fond memories?**

19:30 I don't remember anything about Christmases in Goondiwindi. Probably because there wasn't a lot of money around my uncle. I can't even remember getting a Christmas present. But I'm sure I would have got something. But that's probably something that

20:00 I really haven't thought about till you just mentioned it, about Christmases out there. I can remember Christmases with Mum and things like that, but not at Goondiwindi.

**I was wondering how, with seven children, that went around.**

It was hectic, but I don't remember a Christmas. I can remember going to Carols by Candlelight thought. Just down at the Domain.

20:30 That's just come, flashed by at the moment. [...]

**Were you brought up to be a Catholic by your mother?**

No, I'm a Lutheran. I remained as a Lutheran. However, my wife, my children, all my children are Catholics today.

21:00 I just didn't see the need for me to change to becoming a Catholic.

**Your kids are Catholic because of your wife?**

Yes. But the two boys go to a Lutheran school here in Rothwell in Redcliffe. I found it difficult - that Jude and I, this is both our second marriages. Judy's

21:30 Catholic and she wanted to get remarried in a Catholic church and that's going back 20 something years now. There were just so many barricades put up for her. She had to get an annulment and all that. We still have a relationship with her ex-husband. We go to parties and he'll be there. There's no animosity or anything, but they just wanted her

22:00 to say things that weren't true, just to get the annulment. So we went to the Lutheran church, and believe it or not, this is while I was still in the army at Townsville, we used to travel something like 800 kilometres for four weekends in a row, we used to have counselling sessions with the minister before he would marry us. That was quite a lengthy trip. I can remember one thing, we nearly failed that. Or I didn't, Jude did.

22:30 One of the questions he asked was, "Who manages the household with the budget?" My answer was that it should be done by the pair of us. Jude, her upbringing was that the male of the household was the important part, he done it. She failed and I got a tick in the box. After the questions he asked you, he said that if Jude didn't change her way of thinking

23:00 about that he wouldn't have married us, which I find extremely difficult. But ironically, today, she manages the budget because I got it, I spend it. She's just, "This is what we've got, this is the bills we've got to pay, this is what we've got." I get my \$50 a week, spending money, that's gracious of her, being the main breadwinner of this household. That's it, once I run out, that's it. I don't get any more.

**23:30 I reckon most women do the budgets in the house.**

I've got to be honest. I prefer her to do it too. She's very methodical. She's got the computer set up upstairs with 'Quicken' and if I use one of the credit cards, believe it or not, the credit cards are in my name, but I wasn't allowed to know the pin numbers. This is how good my wife is. But now, I have a credit card which I don't have to have a pin number for, but I've got to give her the

24:00 receipt and I've got to get the approval to use it. It's a pretty tight household, but we have a lot to show for it. I've got three motorbikes in the shed, and a car, so she's done really well.

24:30 **You mentioned your daughter being ill. Was she born with Crohn's disease?**

Yeah, we didn't know at a very early age. With my first wife, I probably, we got divorced when Melanie was about seven or eight. After a while my first wife probably got a good dose of the social life and couldn't look

25:00 after Melanie, so we raised her from then. We couldn't work out why she kept soiling her pants and things like that. We took her to the doc. She had, what do they call it? Just pains in her tummy and they'd give her laxatives to motion the movement. This went on for years. Constipation's the word I was looking for. It wasn't until she was,

25:30 probably at the age of 26, that she found the right doctor and was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. We put all that down to all my chemical imbalances, if you want to call it, that I believe. I don't believe, I know that I've got chemical imbalances in my system. She's got Crohn's Disease, my eldest son has a learning difficulty where he has no short term memory.

26:00 What happens there was that he's the type of person where in the classroom you can be talking to him and give him a sentence to remember and ask him three minutes later and he won't remember a word. But long term memory he's very good at. Young Sam, plus he's also got muscle "Toad" problems in his

26:30 knees and so forth. His knees suffer pain and things like that. Sam has a double tailbone and also a double crown. However he also gets pains in the joints as well. Anne-Marie, my second-eldest daughter, she's from Jude's first marriage, so she's fit and able.

27:00 **The proof is in the pudding, so to speak, insofar as your work with defoliants.**

I've got pictures of me spraying defoliants and things like that. This cancer operation I'm about to have, I'm going to ask them to do a toxicology report on my stomach. My specialist,

27:30 Peter Stephenson, said, "The cancer that you have is caused by chemicals." I have never sprayed any chemicals in my entire life other than the Agent Orange. I've never been a farmer or anything like that. That's all I've ever done was exposed to Agent Orange and also spraying it. So I'm 100% positive and I'm very annoyed with all forms of government that

28:00 haven't come out and said, "Yeah, we'll own up. The defoliant was toxic and has caused problems, birth defects and also major problems with the servicemen that served in Vietnam."

**It's also very psychological. There's a lot of research on suicide and**

28:30 **the children of Vietnam veterans are quite high up on the list of young suicides in Australia.**

Yes.

**It rolls on. The ripple effects are vast.**

It does. It really does roll on. I thought that I've only came about being diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder

29:00 because I was probably in the last six years, because I was given an ultimatum from Jude. To me I was normal. To Jude and the kids I was a fair mongrel. At one stage in Puckapunyal I hit the grog pretty heavy. Jude was pregnant with Jason, I didn't physically hit her, but I manhandled her. I broke her watch. She still has that today, which she keeps

29:30 as a memento. Then again we sorted that out and then I got out of the army and my temper picked up again. So she gave me an ultimatum to seek help to Veterans' Affairs and so I'm now seeing a psychologist and specialists. I've got a drawer full of tablets out there that I take

30:00 for my medical condition. I have no oesophagus valve up here. I have severe ulceration of my oesophagus. I've also had Barrett's, which has all been put down to alcohol and also chemical related. I put a claim in against Veterans' Affairs for the alcohol causing all the Barrett's and so forth, but I

30:30 lost that because the commissioner saw that Mr Kingswell was an expert witness in regards to my psychological profile, and I lost out. Although I complained to Mr Kingswell in regards to the manner that he conducted the interview, I don't believe it was correct. But the commissioner at that time was in awe of this gentleman who had

31:00 all these qualifications and didn't see my case. So I lost. So I'm allowed to challenge. That was last year, so I've got two years where I can rechallenge it and hoping that these tests come out from this that I'll be able to do that, and have the documentary evidence to hit this Dr. Kingswell on the head in regards to his expert logic that he put across to the commissioner.

31:30 As you can tell by the tone in my voice and the way I talk, I'm very upset about that. I've just had to increase my medication because it affects me very much. Today I'm still a very angry person about that. I know people that shook the system to get their gold cards or their TPIs [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensions]. I'm not like that. I stand up front, give them the truth. I expect to be taken

32:00 on face value with the evidence that I produce. One of the biggest downfalls, I'll include my solicitor in here, was that I started drinking at the age of 17, when I joined the army. In those days the drinking age was 21. The reason, I could say, "Yes, I have ownership, I have responsibility", but to a 17 year old that has all this alcohol available to him at, we call them boozers or clubs or pubs,

32:30 that weren't policed by military staff or anything like that, it was readily accessible, available for me to get. So I thought, "Yup", so I did. I drank pretty excessively in some occasions and that's what they put all this down to a lot of excessive drinking, but it wasn't accepted by the commissioner because I had a bit of a binge when I was, not a binge, but at my 16th birthday

33:00 my mates got me drunk and he put it all down to that being the attributive factor. So, see yours.

**I hope that can be fixed in its rightful place.**

It's just, all I was asking for was support in taking my medication. I'm on Losec and that's

33:30 every month I'm out of pocket paying for that, I'm out of pocket to get the doctor to refer it. Just horrendous. But we're coping rather well.

**Why did you want to join the police force?**

I think it was the uniform and the prestige to be a policeman. I still have reservations about joining them today, but no. I fell sorry for the poor policemen today because

34:00 he tried, or they try and do the right thing, I'm not being sexist, they do the right thing and something goes wrong. Before you know it they're before the CMC [Crime and Misconduct Commission], their hands are tied. I couldn't be like that. But those days I was in awe of the police those days. When I failed punctuation, oh my God, I was devastated, I really was. When the sergeant said, "I'm sorry, you're unsuccessful. You failed punctuation."

34:30 "All right." I look back at that now. I tried to rejoin again in '74 in Townsville before I got out of the army, but I got a tattoo on the lower part of my arm and what he said to me was that he couldn't accept an application from me because I would have to wear long-sleeved shirts all the time because we didn't really accept policemen with tattoos. That was 1974 and that was the

35:00 inspector in Townsville in those days, but I can't remember his name.

**I wonder now if you can go in the police force with tattoos.**

Yeah, I've seen policemen with more tattoos than I've got. So yes.

**They used to have all those restrictions. You had to be a certain height, not flatfooted**

Height, not flatfooted, that's the stuff. I had everything. Don't get me wrong, the army also had that too, had a height-weight ration. They still do today in regards to, not necessarily the height.

35:30 We do have a height-weight ration when you're in. They look at a basic, when you're so high, you should be at a certain weight level and so forth. But today, you can join the army right up to the age of 55 because they now got rid of all those restrictions because they were classed as discriminative.

**36:00 If you join at 49 you won't be as fit as you would be at 27, so the training would adapt to...**

What they have, with the army today they have different levels of fitness assessment. For the younger persons they have a level, they may be required to do so many

36:30 sit-ups, do the 2.4 run in so many minutes, and also so many push-ups. Get to my age, at the ripe age of 53 and I've got to do two push-ups. So what they do, I think it's about 12 sit-ups. I've got 15 minutes to do the run in. So what they do, the older you get they allocate for a range of, and assessments to cater for your

37:00 age. But that still doesn't really get you over, because there's a lot of physical demands put on you when you're going through recruit school and also your employment training, like Kapooka and things like that they've got what they call the Challenge, where you've got so many hours to do route march, fire the range, go through the obstacle course and things like that.

**Do they train the women with the men in the army?**

37:30 **No, at this stage, down at Kapooka, they still do the same training package, but they have segregated platoons. They'll have a female platoon and a male platoon and they'll be like a sister platoon. They will start on the same day, do the same activities, however the girls will live in a different block and things like that. Once they finish all that stuff and get into the employment training, that's where it changes. The male and the females are on the exact same course**

38:00 **as the males. The exact same training. They're looking at more maturity, and at that stage you know the dos and don'ts that you're allowed to do in regards to fraternisation and things like that.**

### **You're not allowed to go out with somebody in training?**

It's frowned upon. Especially if either party

- 38:30 outranks the other one. What I look at is that it should be off base. What happens off base is fine. However, on base, yes, it's very much frowned upon. If you and I were in the service together, Heather, [interviewer] and we'd go into the same mess and then I asked you out on a date, it would be frowned upon. It's very hard for,
- 39:00 especially for I know couples now where he was a major and she was a warrant officer. Two single persons. To me, why shouldn't it happen? They fell in love, but they had to get the CO's [Commanding Officer] approval to go out because one was an officer and one was an enlisted person. But now they're happily married, so...
- 39:30 Sometimes I think we lose the plot.

## **Tape 3**

- 00:33 **The police didn't want you.**

No, no. I wanted them, but they didn't want me.

### **What made you go for army over navy or air force?**

They were the first in response to my request of, "Who wants me?". So the guy there said

- 01:00 to me, "We'll have you." So I thought, "OK". I went over there and he gave me all the application forms and I took them home to Mum because Mum had to sign in those days because I was under 19. She had to approve for me to. But Mum was very supportive. So I went back, had the aptitude test, had the medicals and got sworn in and put on a train and sent to Sydney and then the bus from Sydney to Kapooka.

### **What things**

- 01:30 **were in the aptitude test?**

Mate, that's such a long time ago. No, sorry. Yes, it was. I remember some of them. One of the things was that you had the cogs. You might have a cog going one way and you might have a series of cogs. They want to know at the end which way that cog's going, whether it's anti clockwise, anyway, I buffed all them. So after the aptitude test what they said to me was

- 02:00 that I had no mechanical aptitude whatsoever, but very clerical. It's ironic today that I've had, what is it now? 27 years in the Royal Australian Corps of Transport and six in infantry. I've been transporting cogs and so forth, so I just proved that theory wrong.

### **There's got to be one slipping through the system.**

Oh yes.

### **Were there any questions to deal with**

- 02:30 **army life?**

I vaguely remember questions about, "Why do you want to join the army?" But those were more or less questions that were asked of me from the psychologist that we had. As well as doing all that you had to be set to have an interview as we are now, by a psych, to see whether he or she thought that you were suitable to join.

- 03:00 That's be one of the questions. I think my response was, "Security", was the first one because those days I looked at the service as being 20 years in the service, I can retire on a full pension tax-free and, "Hey, I'm made." So I looked at that.

### **Even back then you were thinking that far ahead.**

That far ahead, yeah. I must admit that when I got out in '74, obviously my

- 03:30 goals changed. I got back in '78. When goals I'd set myself was that by the end of my 20th, I'd previously, you'd buy back the previous service through DFRDB [Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits scheme], so I bought that back and I said, "Once I complete 20 years I at least want to be a sergeant." After I completed 20 years I was an RSM, so my goals kept changing. Then when I got from regular army to army reserve

- 04:00 my goals changed again, and now I'm a commissioned officer they've moved again. So they're continuously moving. At this stage, if the army will have me, I'll probably retire at 60.

**What did you know when you signed up of war?**

Only what I'd seen on TV from Vietnam. That's all I knew. The police force was

04:30 the be all and end all. I can't honestly say what actually made me do a left-hand turn into the recruiting doors, but I did. Maybe I was looking for a life that was structured for me. Discipline, this is the way it's done, this is how we done it, this is when we want it done by. Maybe I was looking for something like that. I couldn't do the police force, so let's look at the services as the next best thing. After a while I thought "OK, I've made the right choice."

05:00 **What were you seeing on TV at the time about Vietnam?**

All I'd mainly seen was some of the operations where there was conflict where Australian soldiers had been killed and the opposition forces were being killed as well. Communism, well, you get to read about it through papers and then you get to hear about people's personal beliefs about communism and

05:30 all that sort of stuff. That's what we were going to do. I really didn't get involved in the politics of it at that stage. I was just there. I'd signed on to do a job and that's what I wanted to do.

**From a career point of view?**

Well, it did. Those were the days where you signed up either for three or six. I said, "No, I'm a gung-ho mug." It was six years I signed up for, so yeah.

06:00 **What were your first impressions of Kapooka?**

"Holy Dooley, what the hell have I let myself in for?" What happened was we catch a train to Sydney and then were met by recruiting staff from the recruiting, then we're all held over. Then we all catch a bus to Wagga. Prior to getting in, this big burly military cop gets in and says, "Right-o, you bastards. We don't want any guns, alcohol, if you've got any of it now, declare it."

06:30 Then we got off the bus, and a lot of them had long hair. We walked into the big kitchen area, the mess we call it, where there's wolf whistles and all that sort of stuff. But after we had our haircuts we done the same thing when all the new recruits come in. I went in winter down there and it's a cold hole of a place. Also, what happened was, when I rejoined in '78,

07:00 because I'd been out for that four years they made me go through Kapooka again. It was better the second time because I was a Vietnam veteran and I had six years' experience and the recruit staff didn't give me an easy job. They didn't make it any easier for me because I still had to pass all the tests, but they had respect for what I'd done in the past. I appreciated that

07:30 from them.

**This was the late '60s and there was a lot of buzz about fashion and free thinking. Was it a mixed bunch of people who came in?**

Yeah. Very mixed. We had national servicemen.

08:00 One guy I got pretty pally with, he was a qualified schoolteacher. I saw these people from all different walks of life. Some thought, "OK, my number's come up so I'm going to do my two years and I'm getting out, end of story". Others thought, "Well, why has it come up?", and try and fight a little bit. But most of them were

08:30 happy to do their two years and say, "OK, I've done my bit for Australia", and call it quits. We were not allowed to go on leave for the first six weeks down there. From there on we went on leave in uniform, so my jeans and studded belt and all that sort of stuff just had to stay in the locker and I couldn't wear it.

09:00 It's entirely different today. We probably don't encourage people wearing uniform going on leave. Reason being the current state of the world with terrorism and stuff like that. It just depends on what you're going to be doing in regards to maybe attending a conference in Canberra, you may be down and back the same day, so you're not going to take

09:30 three lots of clothes or two lots of clothes. You're going to go down in uniform and come back in uniform. But everything's pretty well restricted because you're dropped off at the airport, airport security, security on the plane, met by army driver down the other end. So really...

**Tell us what the first few days were like at Kapooka.**

What we done was, I was 21 Platoon those days and my section

10:00 commander was Corporal Day, who later become Sergeant Day. He got promoted. He probably doesn't think that I remember him, but I do. The first couple of days was a patter of haircuts, teach us how to make beds, and then we had to go down to the Q [Quartermaster's] store, get issued all our uniforms. Then we'd come back and then be taught how to iron our uniforms, wear our uniforms, how to spit polish, how to make a bed the army way, not the way that my kids try and

10:30 make it, but the army way, I don't mind admitting that my bed wasn't made properly one day and it was

thrown out of two flights. We were on the top floor and if it wasn't made properly, out it went. I had to go down and pick it up and they gave me ten minutes to pick it all up and have it remade to army standard. The fold back, you had to have a ruler there, 12 inches spot on. If it wasn't, out it went or they ripped the sheets off.

### **Can you talk us through the...?**

- 11:00 Making the bed? Making the bed, what you had to do was you had to have hospital folds, which is, for the bottom sheet, you tuck your sheets in either end. Let's say we're working the right-hand side, you had to pull it up then you tucked the corner in underneath and then fold it back down, that's on both corners, so you had the nice 45-degree angle sheet, that had to be tight. That had to be done on both sides. Top sheet was tucked in the end.
- 11:30 Same again, however you had to have a 12-inch spot-on fold back from the top. That was measured by mirror and it had to be tucked in and it had to be so tight that back, they flipped their 20 cent coin off it, it had to bounce. If it wasn't, you either picked your bed up from downstairs or they'd rip it apart and you had to make it. So I had mine picked up from downstairs.

### **Whole bed or just the mattress?**

Whole bed. The bed

- 12:00 spring, the head ends, the lot. Teaches you though. Never do it again. We also had to polish the floors every day. We used to do them at night before we'd go to bed, put the mats out and then we'd do them again in the morning. In the hallways they had brass. We had to polish all the brass, all our socks, all our underwear. Sorry, all the army's socks and underwear, because we weren't allowed to have
- 12:30 civilian clothes in our locker, it was all army. All had to be a certain way. The socks had to smile at you.

### **What does that mean?**

When you fold them, you fold them so it comes up so when you look at the socks it's got a grin on it. So everything was set out in accordance with a detailed layout that they wanted you to have it set on.

### **If you were to open a locker door, what**

- 13:00 **should you be looking at?**

Something that looks immaculate. There shouldn't be anything out. You'd be looking at uniforms hung up in accordance with the layout. You might have your battledress and your raincoat, then your greens, your PT [Physical Training] gear, your runners had to be white all over, things like that. Your rifle had to be set up a certain way.

- 13:30 Sometimes they might inspect, they might have the rifle broken down on the personnel table so they can inspect that as well. Terrifying at time for the room inspections. What they used to do on weekend, we didn't train on weekend unless you're the duty 2, or duty company. So what they used to ensure that you're out of bed. And just to tick you off a bit more to make sure,
- 14:00 some people got cunning, I was one, and wouldn't sleep in your bed, you'd sleep on your mat so you didn't have to make your bed. (UNCLEAR). So what they done was they caught onto it. Every morning at 6 o'clock we had to be outside on the parade ground with two sheets over our arms. We had to pull out, so we started sleeping in them then. They're cunning. Looking at it today, I can see
- 14:30 why all that was done, I really can now. It doesn't happen anymore because with the bastardisation and all that sort of stuff. With the bed situation about being thrown out, one did get thrown out but nearly killed a couple of people because when they threw them out they weren't looking who was down there. It nearly hit a couple of people so they ceased that practise. They would probably still pull the sheets off and get you to remake your bed. I'm only surmising that, I haven't been down there lately.

### **What**

- 15:00 **other elements of bastardisation happened when you were being trained through Kapooka?**

We had a couple of people that wouldn't shower. We took that matter in our own hands. We got them in the shower with sandsoap and a scrub brush. Things like that. Or what you'd do, they would make you grab your toothbrush because your toothbrush may have been incorrectly,

- 15:30 in the manner it was supposed to be laid out, and you had to go out into the toilets and clean the grouting with your toothbrush. Things like that. The other one is that they may give you what they call heads. You may be dressed up in your PT uniform and they may give you three minutes to be dressed up in your polyesters. They used to do all that sort of stuff too, just to check to see how quick you can change uniform.
- 16:00 **They could come at any time?**

Any time.

### **What was the initial block of training you did at Kapooka?**

Once we got issued all our kit and were ready to start they used to teach us how to do drill. Attention, stand at ease, how to march, get the arm swinging and how to salute. They were the most important things you had to be taught first, because

16:30 if you're marching anywhere you had to be able to salute officers and all that sort of stuff. One of the big problems we used to have was that warrant officers used to wear peaked caps. We always thought, peaked caps we salute. We saluted a warrant officer one day and he said, "Son, don't salute me, I work for a living." Meaning as a non-commissioned officer, wasn't an officer. Some took it very funny like that, but other guys used to rip our tonsils out. Yell and rant and rave at us.

17:00 You soon get to learn to look what was on the shoulder. We used to just hone in on the peaked cap and that was it. He was an officer, but probably a warrant officer.

**You get yelled at not to salute if...**

Yeah, because a warrant officer wasn't entitled to the compliments of the other commissioned officers. Yeah, rant and rave. And say, "I work for a living."

17:30 But looking back today I chuckle about all that. I get yelled at and I just think, "Yeah". Even when I was in some situations, although today my son's in cadets and I often see people, especially the undergraduates, yelling at kids. I'll just have a quiet word in their ear. You don't achieve anything by yelling today. I achieve

18:00 a lot more by sitting down with the person and talk about what went wrong, why it went wrong, what they can do to fix the problem or how both of us can sit down and work it out and fix the problem properly. That's a motto that I've always firmly believed that I have instructed on people that I've come in contact with. Especially my son now. He's a sergeant in cadets.

18:30 **Would you apply that across the field in terms of orders?**

Depends on the situation. Sometimes in a theatre of war, sometimes in the contact drills, you had to yell to get the message across to be heard. You may not be yelling at the person because they'd been a do-do. You may be yelling at that person because there's other noises in the background. I think people tend to

19:00 look at that and see these other noises that have gone up obstruct you from being able to hear what I'm saying. On a parade ground for instance, when I was RSM I used to have regimental parades. Sometimes you yelled to get your message across. You might get a group of 300 people working and harnessing together like attention and stand at ease. Then you may yell

19:30 at front rank number three because they didn't do it properly. But it was just because you were so far away from them that you had to get the message across. This yelling and chest poking, to me, doesn't achieve anything today. I also use that in my civilian field as well. Yelling at people, it achieves nothing, just shows some of the managers don't look at that.

20:00 **How long did they spend on drill to get you all up to scratch?**

That was the whole 12 weeks. It encompassed, you might have two periods, there was a 40-minute period, you may have one of those a day and you may not have one of those till next week. So it was just structurally progress over

20:30 the 12 week period. So by the time you did the march out parade at the end of the 12 weeks you put it all together and it all fit in together. You may have a morning at 7:30, two periods down doing PT. You had to get back, shower, get changed. Then you might have a period of drill. Then you might have another period after that of weapons or maybe with the padre.

21:00 May have sessions with the padre [chaplain]. Character Guidance they used to call it those days. So everything would change. It wasn't half a day doing drill. In some cases you might do two or three periods of drill, but you would only have 40 minutes, have a break, another 40 minutes and so forth. Those days they were pretty well structured because they had to take into account the climatic conditions, because by having people standing out there in the cold.

21:30 At Wagga you get that westerly coming off the snow and it doesn't matter what clothes you wear, just cuts straight through you. So a lot of people will lose the memento.

**What kind of weapons did they instruct you at Kapooka?**

The main one we used was the SLR and the old 9 mill F1. They were the two. We done a little bit on the 9 mill pistol, but

22:00 predominantly it was the SLR. Self Loading Rifle 7.62.

**How would they train you in it?**

They would start from the word go and it'd all be safety, safety, safety, safety. They teach you the characteristics of the weapon, like how to clean the weapon, how to make a weapon safe, what to look



for if the weapon didn't fire. I must admit, safety was utmost

- 22:30 importance those days. I remember you'd go down the range and you might do zeroing your weapon. I can remember one guy turning around with his rifle and had a live round of ammo. He got yelled at severely and I don't mind saying that he deserved it, because he could have killed somebody. We've heard some time ago, probably going back 10 years ago, here in Enoggera in Brisbane that a young
- 23:00 lass was shot at a range out at Greenbank because somebody turned around with a weapon that was loaded and it went off. Safety is very important. I don't mind admitting that they were good at it because the people that taught us were professional and they were trained to be able to teach you. We
- 23:30 were more or less training for a theatre of war as well, so you had so many seconds to load your magazine with 20 rounds. Then you had so many seconds where you had to go through, I'll call them the IAs, which stands for Immediate Action, which is the load, instant, unload and all that sort of stuff. It was all done in a set sequence, so it doesn't matter whether it was done at day, night, hail, snow, it was always that sequence that you knew how to load the weapon, how to come into
- 24:00 the action condition, ah, and also firing the weapon. Also strip and assembling. Everything was laid out in sequence. So if my weapon was laid out and I was shot, you could come and put my weapon together in sequence, you wouldn't have to be fighting for parts. That's very much in today. Today we have the Steyr, which you've probably heard there's a lot of things about the Steyr. We've had a lot of unauthorised discharges,
- 24:30 especially over in the Timor area. So again, the training in that is exactly the same, very, very safety conscious. But the people that went to the initial influx at Timor I believe hadn't had the necessary exposure of working with the Steyr rifles, and that's why we had a lot of UDs, Unauthorised Discharges.
- 25:00 That's my opinion. So they went about rectifying that now, where we have to pass a competency every year and it's a pass/fail. There's no in between. We have to go through those actions called by the assessor and either pass or fail. If you fail, go back to retraining and come back through it again.

**Was there anything like that at Kapooka?**

Yes. Exactly the same with the SLRs. When you actually

- 25:30 left you were competent in everything. Those were the days that it was pass or fail. Today is terminology. It's "competent" or "not yet competent". So with modern technology.

**But you know you've to a chance to come back and do it again if you fail?**

Yeah, you go back for retraining and then. I know some people that just couldn't get it and they'd go back for retraining and retraining and still couldn't get it, so they would be back squadded to the next platoon to

- 26:00 get that training.

**What were some things fellows would have most problems with?**

Loading magazines, believe it or not. You had so many seconds to load 20 rounds in your magazine.

**Do you remember how many?**

No. Those things. So you had to have the magazine in a set position. You used to have them lined out and things like that. People just lacking that coordination skill and that's what they kept failing on and weren't

- 26:30 allowed to continue on. Once you passed that you wouldn't go onto the next days of going through action, instant, unload. So that's why we were over there in practise.

**Is this taking rounds from a belt to load into the magazine?**

It's a clip. Five to a clip and you get four clips. When we used to do those, they were just practise dummy rounds that we'd be using. They weren't live.

- 27:00 **In your experience of the SLR, what were the pros and cons?**

I reckon the pro, I reckon it's a good hard impact weapon. I've seen what it does, the damage it causes to property and human beings. It's a very lethal weapon and when an SLR

- 27:30 round hits a person, it makes a rather big mess when it comes out. Also, all the damage is actually caused when the bullet comes out from its target. Disadvantages, I suppose it was like a rust bucket. You might get a bit of fog and it'd take one look at the damp air and rust. I can remember that cost me \$25 because

- 28:00 my rifle was rust, my gas regulator had a bit of rust in it. So what I had to do was either take a charge or put \$25 into the platoon funds for the end of year party, this is going through recruit school. I said "\$25, here you go". They used to rust very quick. They'd take one look at the damp weather and rust

would form. They were pretty heavy also.

28:30 You could only fire single shot, whereas a Steyr today is a single shot or automatic.

**Fully automatic?**

Yeah, fully automatic.

**Were there other weapons?**

The F1.

**What was that?**

The F1

29:00 used to come with a 9-round pistol. It was a machinegun. A little toy thing it was, looked like a toy. You could pretty well run faster than the bullets. Really. I really don't know why we kept it. Whether it was as a deterrent or anything like that. A lot of people in Vietnam were wishing those weapons were more or less back in the support areas and places like Vung Tau and stuff like that. I don't believe it was a weapon

29:30 designed for close quarter fighting, contact stuff like that. Although, you saw in Malaya, Korea and those places they had them because it was a fully automatic weapon. Again, a single shot fully automatic. But it just didn't have the oomph as the SLR to cause the damage that you wanted to inflict on the enemy.

**And the pistol?**

The 9 mill pistol was the same. That was just a single shot. That was

30:00 a weapon more or less for personal protection. Just something you wore on your hip like police do today. The police just went from the 9 mill to the Glocks. It was just for protection. Same round as the F1, but mainly for close quarter protection.

**Were you issued with knives, anything like that?**

We were issued bayonets for the SLR. We were taught bayonet fighting. I, we

30:30 really got into close quarters we had fixed bayonets and charge like you see in many movies today. However, we never really got that close into it. That was it. Other knives, we had what we call a clasp knife, which is a knife that has multiple purposes. You can use it as a knife or a can opener or a screw driver or things like that.

**Like a Swiss army knife?**

31:00 No, it was specially made for the army. It just had three or four purposes.

**Single blade?**

Yeah, single blade for cutting and things like that. Then we were issued machetes in Vietnam and before we went to Vietnam as well. Machetes that were blunt. They were just for cutting down foliage, because those days we didn't have the green movement to

31:30 come behind us as we do today to chastise us for knocking down trees that shouldn't have been and things like that. But today's army, I've seen this first hand, we now work very much hand in hand with environmental protection people. A classic example, last year on Swift Eagle, going

32:00 into the field, we're going to operate with the Americans and all that sort of stuff. The environmental people will come with us and we will show them the system of toilets we're going to use and all that sort of stuff. And the areas and things like that. They're very happy because today we need to keep regenerating growth and things like that. I support that, but in a time of war that would just fall by the wayside. But training

32:30 purposes, yes, we need to look after our training, yes.

**Is there a lot of support for that within the ranks?**

Yes. Very much, I think, deep down, a lot of us really have that little green tinge to us. We need to look after the environment. Going back to the days in the 60s when I was in the army, "That tree's in the way", down it came. Just because it was in my way, instead of me going around it or setting up my hootchie or tent

33:00 you'd knock down foliage. Today you think, "OK, there's not much vegetation, it's pretty sparse so we'll let that and we'll put up here", and so forth. I can remember being in truck where you just drive and knock them down. Once you knock them down they're not going to get up and grow again.

**What were other components of Kapooka, or was that essentially it?**

I spent four days in hospital

33:30 down there when I had my teeth removed.

**Sounds like a bold diagnosis for a 17-year-old.**

I didn't mind him taking the front two teeth. There was probably about five teeth that needed to be removed. He said, "I'll remove them all while I'm there." He wanted to remove them all off the bottom too, but I wouldn't let him. So that was, especially

34:00 being in hospital and not having any family around. It was quick. You went in there, had the operation and I was out in two days. One thing about a military hospital, and a lot of people that served in the military will relate. Depending on the level of sickness or your incapacity, you still had to get up at six, you had to make your bed, you had to sweep and mop under your bed and then you were only allowed to lay on the top of your bed.

34:30 That's in '68 when I spent time in hospital at Kapooka. I'm not sure today, because I haven't been in the hospital today in the military. But yes, you had to get up still at six, shower, all that sort of stuff, make your bed, sweep, mop and. Amazing. Must have achieved something. Not sure what though.

**Morale, maybe?**

Well, I'd just look at that...

35:00 Or just saving somebody some time making beds.

**Short staffed on nursing.**

Could have been.

**Were you kitted out in terms of backpack and things like that at Kapooka as well?**

Yeah, we were kitted out with that, however, it was very antiquated stuff. It was the old 59 packs. They were used in World War II. We still had a lot of that gear. A lot of our training

35:30 we had boots and gaiters. We didn't have the sophisticated boots that we wear today. A lot of the stuff we went through was still in miles. We had to do 20 miles in an eight-hour march. Whereas today we're required to do 15 kilometres in 2 hours and 45 minutes.

**The stakes have**

36:00 **gone up.**

Yeah. Just a tad. I still manage to pass all those, though. So it's good. In my situation, it imposed self discipline on me to maintain a level of fitness. So it was god.

**How did you go with the discipline of army life?**

I had the philosophy

36:30 was that there was 30 of us and I was just another one of those 30. So what I was feeling I knew there was another 29 people there feeling the exact same way. So we just got on together and just worked out, got into a routine that best suited our platoon. We were split up into three sections, then each section would have a task. One

37:00 section might be (UNCLEAR) around the building. This is before inspections, one section may be required to clean the SAL block out, the toilets or shower. So we were all allocated tasks to do prior to inspection. The reason that's done is so you have somebody to blame if it wasn't done properly. I know that now.

**What would happen to the fellow if...**

No, everybody. It wasn't pick an individual, you pick the whole section. So you had to make sure the job was done.

37:30 Today I don't necessarily agree with that. Reason, I say that is that one thing I vowed, which I've never ever, ever done was forced a non-smoker to pick up cigarette butts. I can categorically state that I was never forced a non-smoker to pick up cigarette butts. That's something that happened to me. I was forced to pick up cigarette butts and I've never smoked. I hated smoking. So I thought, "If I ever get into a situation or have the rank, that's

38:00 going to be one of my first things that I want to do".

**You'd be a good CO to have.**

Yeah.

## Tape 4

00:31 **When you did your training at Kapooka, did they mention to you, "We think you'd make a good forward scout"?**

No. Everybody goes through Kapooka as one. It's not till you get to what we call your initial employment training, in this case I went to Singleton infantry and they may identify you as having potential to be a machine gunner.

01:00 For instance, the bigger people. They may be good shots. They all get identified at the early stage to be gunners. Forward scouts, no, we didn't have that much training. Most the training was done internally within the training. Because the battalion just come back from Vietnam, it wasn't going to be for another two years because we done the rotation period again and that's when the forward's picked up.

01:30 "You've got the potential to be forward scout" and then put you through the necessary training. The training that I done was pass or fail. If you weren't able to track effectively to the objective you didn't pass.

**Can we talk about your training to be a scout?**

Yeah. Situation is that the trainers may break a twig on a

02:00 tree. You've got to pick up that. It may be on the ground. You may have half a foot imprint in the sand or there may be a bit of ration pack or a piece of paper laying there that's not relevant to the area that you're working in. For instance, a cigarette packet is not going to be relevant for that area

02:30 because where you know somebody's been there. You look at the type of smokes and things like that. Or in water, you may see a footprint. When the water dries out it may leave a small bit of mud. There may be a footprint in the mud. They set up all these little things. They may put a piece of wire across the track, which would indicate a

03:00 mine at either end of it that might blow you up. They used to set up all these little scenarios. But they would train you before you were assessed in it. I still remember that up in high range.

**What do you mean by up at high range?**

That was a training area up in Townsville. We used two training areas, high range and Mount Spec. We used to alternate between the two. That

03:30 culminated in a huge exercise, working out of Ingham as if we were in Vietnam.

**Was it exciting, the James Bond espionage looking for foot prints?**

Probably not the James Bond part of it, but I thought that, "Hey,

04:00 here's a guy that's a city slicker and here I am now tracking through the bush". OK, yes, I'd lived at Goondiwindi, but I'd never done any of that sort of stuff at Goondiwindi. Part of the training is that they teach you to look through the foliage. It's probably easy to say, but harder to explain. Rather than looking at it, look at the bush, everybody would look at the bush, that's nice, but we were taught to look through the bush to see what was there on the other side of it

04:30 or to the side of it. I still have that today. My wife and I will go bushwalking or whatever the case may be and I'll point something out and she'll go, "Where?" And I'll say, "It's over there." Living here at Sandstone Point we'll go for a walk on the beach and we'll take rubbish bags with us. We'll pick up cans, rubbish that people have discarded. I'll say, "I'll just pick that coke can up on the other..." she goes, "What?", I'll say, "The other side of that bush there."

05:00 I can see it because that's what I've been taught to. She looks at it rather than through it. It's different.

**Did they train you with people as well? To look through people rather than at them?**

No, it was just mainly tracking, looking for people. That other area's mainly done with our intelligence people. They were probably taught to interrogate and how to pick witnesses and things like that.

05:30 With my life skills today, I can do that today though. I am a firm believer that first impressions go a real lot. When I first saw Chris [interviewer] and yourself, Heather, I got very good vibes. I said "I feel very comfortable with yous."

**So it wasn't the money we handed you when we came in?**

No, sorry. I must have missed that bit.

06:00 That's the way I am today, if I get bad vibes from a person I'm sorry, I won't meet them again. That goes with some of my people that I have a work that I train. I'll train them, but I get bad vibes from them. I've always had it and I'll always stick by it. My wife's got to the stage now that an example was that

06:30 my young Sam is going out with a, friends with a young girl. Her parents are split up and he'd remarried and she's living four doors up. He dropped Natalie off here and my wife got bad vibes about him, but I've had a good vibe. So I said, "No, I'm happy with him" so she's happy with him. So far I've been, people call it judge of character and I just call it

07:00 first impressions go well.

**When you were doing scouting training, did you meet mates that were also being trained to be forward scouts as well?**

I was the forward scout and we also had number 2 scouts as well, so we used to work as two-man teams, one up and one back. So there was probably about ten of us on the

07:30 course. Some failed though.

**Are you in touch with any of the ones?**

I have lost total contact with everybody I've served with. Reason being I'm very much a family person now. I will go to reunions, but I don't go back bringing up the past. We're a very close-knit family.

08:00 I believe that I still have family barbecues where we invite the girls up with their partners once a month. We just have family get-togethers. I'm not saying that I find it difficult to find friends or anything, but I probably have more girl friends than male friends and my wife's exactly the same. She's got more

08:30 male friends. We seem to get on better with the opposite sexes. Don't ask me how it comes about, but it does. That's the way it is and it's always been that way with both of us. We have full trust with one another. She goes learning how to Latin dance and she's got a guy that she partners off with. I trust her and she trusts me.

**After the scouting training and you**

09:00 **passed, how long was that?**

That went for about a month, four weeks. A lot of theory and then a lot of practical as well. The theory part of it was mainly going into training for what signs that the enemy used to use for mines. There were lots. Like broken twigs and they used to have set distances. Although there's a broken twig

09:30 may mean something, but they may have another twig that's further over, which means that the mine's not there, meant it was over there. So it took a fair bit. That's the sort of stuff they used to put out on the training course. We used to have these little purple puffers that were imitation grenade. They'd bury them and just had a little thing. So when you stood on it, it went "poof" and went purple smoke, meaning that you're dead.

10:00 **After this training, what was the goal of the army then? Were you training until you got sent off?**

Yeah. Every time we went and trained for

10:30 going back to Vietnam I would be number 1 scout so we'd patrol with me up the front and so forth. We done that all the time. We'd have make-believe enemy and they would do the signs and all that sort of stuff. We'd have to try and pick them up. A couple of times I didn't pick things up and I was blown up with the little purple puffer and things like that. It was all the training activity to be able to install in us that

11:00 I may have even a bit lax in one area. Patrolling, the front guy's looking at 180 degrees from left to right. That's a rather big area. But the pace was very slow too. If I wasn't happy, I would set the pace, if I wasn't comfortable I'd slow down a bit and take my time looking at things.

**Did you do that in**

11:30 **Vietnam?**

Yes, more so in Vietnam than in training. Reason being, with training you know you're not going to be killed. You're going to stand on a puffer and go "der". But Vietnam, if you stand on one, nine times out of ten you're going to be killed or dismembered pretty badly.

**With the training, did the men in your platoon**

12:00 **start to trust you as a forward scout and that was the same as in Vietnam?**

Yes. That's probably part and parcel of forming the team. Everybody gets to know one another very well. We used to sleep all in the same area, we all ate together and things like that. Everybody knew what everybody had to

12:30 do. OK, I was number 1 scout. We had a number 2 scout. Everybody knew who had the jobs and who was where. We each had trust. We had full faith in our section commander to be able to get us through

if we were shot at or whatever the case be. He had the knowledge on how to react to that situation. We had faith in the gunners. One of their responsibilities was to at

13:00 all times, high ground or the right. So we knew that he was either up there or on our right hand side. So everybody had a role to play and everybody knew what role. But being scouts, they had full faith in both of us.

**The same men that you trained with, you went to Vietnam with?**

Yes.

**That's both good and bad.**

Yes. You can look at it that way, but then we spend a fair bit of time.

13:30 We went out on operations, but we also done fire support base where you might be sent to a fire support base. Fire support base is a place where you might have a battery of artillery set up to provide covering guns to other operations. So you may have a company of infantry dug in to protect them. So we may not go anywhere. We may just sit there for a couple of

14:00 weeks and we may just go out and do some clearing patrols or standing patrols or things like that. Also, one of the jobs over there, it doesn't matter whether you're, for instance in Nui Dat, whether you're in catering corps, or whether you're a medic. You still went out and you still actually patrolled. We used to have what we call tail patrols, which, for instance, a corporal in the catering corps may be given the responsibility of taking out a section of people two or three

14:30 kilometres out from the wire and setting up for a listening post for the night. Although he's catering corps, he still had to have the required instincts to be able to lead men into battle. That's the primary role that everybody had, was that you're infantry first and then your allocation of corps was second. If I had my way, in the younger days, everybody would go to infantry first and then be allocated a corps

15:00 thereafter. So everybody get a working knowledge of how an infantry section works. OK, the infantry section today is changed to the way that we operated in those days, but it gives them an understanding and knowledge of how they're to act if contacted upon. They're mainly taught that now, is when they go and do promotion courses for become a corporal or to become a sergeant. You're required to do a promotion course.

15:30 There, in corporal's course you are taught to be a section commander. A section commander is required to lead men and women into battle, whatever the case maybe.

**Can you tell us where your infantry training has changed since your days?**

It probably changed when

16:00 we got the new weapons. That was about 1992, we got the Steyr and the MAG 58 [machine gun] and things like that. They now have to MAG 58s in the section now, so they have the two gunners. I really haven't gotten involved in how they train with that, but that's changed. So now they've doubled their firepower, which is a good thing. I can remember in our days that

16:30 with the gun, the gun was our main firepower, everybody had to carry a 100 round belt of Link ammunition for the gun. If the gun ran out we were all dead. So as well as carrying our own stuff, I would probably carry 200 rounds of Link ammunition and then everybody else would probably have a couple of hundred rounds. The gunner would probably have more and the number 2 would have more. On top of that we had our grenades. But today a lot of that's changed.

17:00 I think today we've gone from, I'll call it jungle warfare training, to urban warfare training. A lot of the places we go in now, Timor and Iraq and all those places, we're working out of buildings and we're patrolling actually through towns and cities so the whole concept has changed. So I think they've had to realign their training of

17:30 the basic section to be able to accommodate this type of warfare that we've had to come across, or be called to assist in today. I fully support the government today in supporting these types of assistances that we're required to attend.

**You were too light to be a machine gunner.**

18:00 I was a runt. I mean, that was probably fat for me. I was too light, so that's probably why I took on the scout position. Since I've been married to Jude she's fattened me up. She's upset with me though, because when she first met me I was 75-inch waist. I'm now up to a 92, so that's her fault, but she won't get to see this.

18:30 So it must be her cooking.

**If you were too light, then a woman would be too light to do machine gunnery. The women in the army now, are they not in the infantry?**

They're not in the infantry types sections where they're serving

- 19:00 in up front in a role. However they may be there in an administrative type support role. Like medical, nurses and things like that. That's a philosophy that I have personally. I'm in the Royal Australian Corps of Transport, in some cases I've seen ladies that try and change a tyre. In the theatre of war we don't have the luxury of ringing up RACQ [Royal Automobile Club of Queensland]
- 19:30 or anything like that. You've got to be able to change it yourself and I've seen a lady try and undo the wheel nuts and she's just been unable to do it. But then I've seen some other ladies that can do it better than some guys. So I think there has to be that balance there for them to be able to do it. But now, don't get me wrong, we now have the young ladies that are now driving our vehicles that now are getting reasonably close to
- 20:00 where the action's happening. There's driving, taking forward food and water and fuel. So it's opening up for them now. I think we have got a female pilot now in Black Hawks. I met her on Swift Eagle last year. So they're starting to come into line. A lot of people would say that
- 20:30 women shouldn't be there. I've got a philosophy that there's places for them up there, but not necessarily actually fighting on the frontline at this stage.

**Why do you think that is at the moment?**

OK. One of the situations that in my time I've been exposed to is that

- 21:00 we've deployed to the field and I've been required to send the ladies back for showers because they've had their menstrual cycle and they've been unable to cope, 'bears with sore heads', and that sort of stuff. They can't control something like that. Those are the areas that we, don't get me wrong, I'm all for, because they need all that sort of stuff. They need the hygiene and when you go into for instance
- 21:30 when we were patrol for six weeks, we'd be in the middle of nowhere. We may not shower. We may not wash ourselves for the whole six weeks. We may just wash our feet and our socks. I'm just not sure whether ladies today would be able to handle that. But we've now gone from that type of warfare to urban type
- 22:00 warfare, so everything's there. The showers, all that's there for them, so yeah, there's time and place.

**So you feel that everybody should be judged on their individual limitations and input?**

I think so. The lass that flies Blackhawks, obviously she has the qualifications and she had the necessary knowledge and experience, that's fine.

- 22:30 That's good. We've got ladies that drive trucks. They passed all the competencies. So they've passed all their training requirements, so they've got the capabilities to be able to do it. So yeah. But it's not for everybody. Some ladies get a real kick out of driving big trucks. We have ladies out there driving the big Macks and things like that. They love it.
- 23:00 **The whole menstrual cycle would bring a smell too, in all honesty, if you're out in jungle, but as you say, they're not so much trained in that area anymore.**
- That's right. Most of the training now is being focused back to the urban type of warfare. So the roles have really changed now, but

- 23:30 it's probably just a matter of time. I'm not sure.

**Does the Australian army look like the Israeli or any other army that has mixed gender?**

We have a lot of mixed gender, especially in the corps of transport where we'll go out on exercises. But when we deploy, depending on where you are and what you do, showers are provided for everybody

- 24:00 and I'm sure that's probably still the same in the Israeli army as well. It's just the combatant roles. Mainly if you're in armoured corps and infantry and things like that, who is to say that down the track we'll get a young lady to operate a Leopard tank or something like that? Who knows?
- 24:30 I'm not sure whether they do compare notes with other countries about how they get on and things like that.

**We interviewed a few Second World War blokes, and their stance is they don't want women on the frontline because of the protective factor that men have towards women. Whether it is natural or nurtured.**

- 25:00 **You haven't mentioned that, so you don't think that's part of it either?**

No, look, I can see where they're coming from. Vietnam wasn't as horrific as World War I and World War II and those areas. I can see where they're coming from where there were thousands killed. Over the 10 years in Vietnam I think we had about 562 killed. Whereas World War II

- 25:30 had thousands and thousands. I think that's because they were exposed to that heavy, graphic fighting,

that's still instilled. Today, if we take the conflicts that we've been involved in, we've been involved in the peacekeeping roles, and also that we're involved in today, I think we've had the one death, the sergeant. But obviously the training and the roles that we're working in, you take Iraq for instance.

26:00 There's quite a few women over there at the moment in various roles. There's been a lot of women to Timor. I think the whole type of warfare is changing. But then again, we may end up back one day, in jungle warfare. Who's to say? But most of it today is working in that urban warfare type of thing.

26:30 In my days in Vietnam I wouldn't have supported women being with me out there because I just don't think they would have coped. Some of the guys didn't cope. I can see where those guys are coming from. But today, I think today's a little bit different. We're working out of towns and cities.

27:00 **All the Second World War have said that Australians just had the innovation in the infantry, the infantrymen that we've interviewed. That innovation intrigues me, because innovation comes from**

27:30 **an individual. Why do you think the Australians are so trained and have that know-how as an army person?**

I've always had the philosophy that we've had the training, but lacked the technical assistance with the latest weapons and all that. We're now getting a lot more sophisticated, which is good.

28:00 In America, I envy the Americans because they had the technology, but really didn't have the appropriate training because there was a lot of them being killed and things like that. I agree with that, but we're now slowly coming onboard. I know we go back 10, 25, 20 years, budgets were cut, all that sort of stuff, but I think we need to remain, I won't

28:30 say competitive, but we need to have the resources available, the training provided and the soldiers skilled enough to be able to go do the job that they're allocated to go and do. That's either whether they're a helicopter pilot, they're a fighting soldier, a forward scout, a gunner, a nurse, truck driver, signals person or whatever the case be. We need to have that. I think in the distant future

29:00 the hands-on fighting, we're now looking at the sophistication of everything, people can pick you up from 10 kilometres away and send in a rocket to kill you. You're not going to be able to see your enemy.

**What is it about the Aussies having great innovation right from the Boer War right up until today? Do you think it's a cultural, think**

29:30 **for themselves?**

You could say that. I also think that I have pride in my flag. I'm not a republican, I'm sorry. My house is a little bit divided on that. We all have our own opinion. Young Sam...To me I've fought for the flag, a lot of people have fought for the flag, wear the slouch hat,

30:00 and it's pride. I think a lot of it stems from the training and also from the way we're raised at home. Going back to my era, I come from a strict family and probably I don't think we've got enough of that today. We hear when that ship was going over that they were giving out those needles, the

30:30 Vaccinations, and a lot of people refused to take the vaccination. You could probably look at it that that was a PR [Public Relations] disaster. Maybe it wasn't explained to them properly. I can remember going through Kapooka and getting needles on both sides in my arms. Vietnam again, needles again. Malaria and so forth. I think we're losing that a little bit today, that pride, because I think the republican issue has come about whereas

31:00 now it's put that little bit of hesitant though in the back of people's. "We should be a bloody republic, why shouldn't we? We should be our own identity?" A lot of people have died for that flag.

**You don't have to answer this. You were really shy with girls,**

31:30 **so were you a virgin when you went off to Vietnam?**

Yes.

**I bet you didn't remain one.**

No. As I keep telling, I'm an international lover.

**In '68, that was the**

32:00 **student demonstrations against Vietnam had been going on for about a year. Were you aware of that going on and what effect did it have on you?**

We were exposed to it. In Lavarack barracks in Townsville we had a university right beside us, James Cook University. We used to have a big rock out the front of our place which was the main entrance into Lavarack barrack. But they'd come along and graffiti it and so

32:30 we would go along and graffiti their underwear on the lines, left at the university. It was tit for tat. It



wasn't like it was down in Brisbane where you had mass demonstrations. It was just, I'll call it fun rivalry. They'd come and graffiti it and we'd go back and spray, mainly the underwear, and paint red knickers and black.

33:00 Our colour was black and we'd paint them black and we'd spray them. Things like that.

**Did you have to wear your uniform?**

Yes.

**We've heard incidents of people coming up and spitting on others, did you have any of that?**

Personally, no. The only abuse that we got exposed to was when we marched back through Townsville back from Vietnam,

33:30 was when we had the rotten eggs, tomatoes, all that sort of stuff, thrown at us. Called baby-killers. That was horrendous. We were over there, we'd done our job, we just didn't need that crap when we came back. I think today's attitudes are changing a bit. You're still going to get your people out there that are 100% adamant we shouldn't be involved in anything.

34:00 That's their opinion. I don't like them protesting, but I can't go and protest against them. I think they should respect our beliefs that we've signed on to do a job, we want to do the job, we don't want to be interfered with, we don't want this occurring when we come back, we don't want to be abused when we go and have a drink or anything like that.

**I suppose that has changed somewhat because the**

34:30 **government has said in the media to not blame the men and women who are sent overseas because they're just doing their job.**

That's right. I still would have my reservations. We've been very fortunate not to have a lot of casualties. I often wonder, if we did have casualties, what the sentiment would be amongst the people. Would we have those demonstrations that we

35:00 had in those Vietnam days, mass demonstrations led by the Labor Party and all those sorts of things. I wonder if we would have had those injuries and so forth. It'd be interesting. I reckon it's great, the men and women that are serving

35:30 over there today, it's a credit to them. You take a look at them, a lot of them turn 18 and here they are, coming back with two gongs and served overseas. Good luck to them. I think it's great.

**What's spit and polish shoes?**

Spit and polish, my favourite, I still do it today. What it is, what they normally do is they issue a pair of boots. They teach you that you've got to bring them up so

36:00 they can see their face in them. There are certain types of boot polish that are very good for this. It's mainly the Kiwi Parade Gloss. You put a lining of polish on it, then you spit on it and you rub the spit into it and you keep doing that until it comes up nice and shiny. I've got it down to a fine art now. I can do my sons boots in under half an hour. That's the caps and the heels and alongside the bottoms.

36:30 Fine art. I've got (UNCLEAR) my spit, now I use water.

**Why would you do that?**

Those were the days you had to do that. It was all spit and polish. Today, the army's changed today, they issue boots now that are all high shine. That was part and parcel. I done a guard when I was in Townsville for the Queen and she inspected us. If you've got a pair of old boots and you walked out there with mud on them, I'm sure

37:00 they'd... it was all...you had a lot of pride in your uniform. Pride, and you wanted to look the best.

**Do you get your sons to spit and polish their shoes?**

No, my son spit polishes his boots though. I still get him spit polish.

**What about a nickname in the army?**

Me? Yup. I had two nicknames. I was Smiley and Broken Nose. Broken

37:30 Nose because I got into a fight and got a broken nose of course, that was my days in Kapooka. Smiley I had in Vietnam because I smiled a lot. It's just the expression on my face. I might be down the dumps or really ticked off, but I'll still have a smile. Not a smirk, but a smile. So they nicknamed me Smiley. Then they wrote a song about me. Remember, "Smiley, you're off to the Asian war"? It wasn't for me though, just a joke there.

38:00 **What did you get into a fight for in Kapooka?**

Just a disagreement, that's all.

### **Can't you remember?**

No, it's ludicrous. I don't believe in it today. That's why I've got such a big hooter today. I've still got a cuff round here somewhere that says, when we left, we graduated after the 12 weeks, it says Lester "Broken Nose" Mengel.

### **Did you think**

#### **38:30 when you signed up that you'd be going to Vietnam?**

Yes. Definitely, yes. I was hoping it was going to last that long. All the movements going around and people saying, "We're not going to go. We're not going to go." "Oh yeah, we're going, we're going, we're going." You put a lot of time and effort into training and you want to be able at the end to put all that into practise and come up

39:00 with the trumps. I'm very fortunate to say that I've been to Vietnam. I would have liked to have gone back on a second tour, but that wasn't going to happen. I haven't been to Timor, I haven't been to Iraq, I haven't been anywhere else other than Vietnam although I'm still in the army today. That doesn't faze me. I've been to one theatre of war.

#### **39:30 You were concerned that you would miss out on the war?**

Because I was 17 I had to wait till 19. It was just something that I was going to go and do anyway, to my Mum's disgust of course. She didn't want me, no, I'll rephrase that, she would support anything I done, but she had reservations. Take a look how many people

40:00 were actually killed in Vietnam over that 10 year period compared to how many killed in Australia. Run over by cars or whatever the case be. It was still going, we put in the training, we knew we were the next battalion on such and such a day. We knew in May that we were going to be flying, so it just...

### **And it was an adventure?**

Yeah, probably say it was an adventure. It was something different. What we

40:30 trained for. That's the way I looked at it. I'd never been overseas before. I thought, "This is going to be great." A bit of a culture shock though, when I got there. It wasn't what I expected.

## **Tape 5**

#### **00:33 How much notice were you given before you were shipped off to Vietnam?**

We knew that we were the next battalion to go back in 1970. More or less when the battalion came back, we knew. So we knew a couple of years in advance. But the exact date we really didn't know. Probably didn't know that for at least a couple of months prior to actually

01:00 leaving.

### **What did you do with your embarkation leave?**

I came home and spent the time with Mum. Then she came back up to Townsville with us and then saw me fly off. Pretty quiet, pretty simple.

### **What did your Mum think of the news that you were**

#### **01:30 finally going over?**

She was extremely worried. Mothers are. She just went with my wishes that I wanted to go and she supported me in everything that I'd done. So she was happy.

### **That's special for her to travel all the way up to Townsville.**

It was. It was good too, because she enjoyed it. She probably hadn't been out of Brisbane. Never been to Townsville anyway. So she almost had a

02:00 holiday.

### **How did they get you over there?**

We flew over by Pan Am, so it was excellent. Took off from Garbutt, the air force base there and looked after by all American staff onboard. It was excellent.

### **What were your first impressions of Saigon?**

As we were coming in to landing, see in all the

02:30 crater holes, but the biggest shock was seeing the poverty that was there and the people fighting over your, the scraps of the cut lunches that we had. The weather was really stinking hot. The biggest thing was kids mainly fighting over scraps that the troops hadn't eaten.

**Were they fishing in the bin?**

Yeah, actually fishing and getting into the rubbish bin itself and pulling out the boxes and pulling out what scraps

03:00 they had left.

**What about the scale of operations? I understand there was a huge amount of traffic.**

At Tan Son Nhut airport here was a heat of traffic because a lot of military aircraft from America there. Obviously the traffic controllers were either American or something like that. That would have been a daunting task for them to manage all the traffic.

03:30 If they had to, say, get a squadron off the ground quickly, they would have had to divert. We had a pretty smooth approach coming in.

**What did they tell you about the South Vietnamese before you went over to Vietnam?**

I don't remember a great deal about them. They just said the war had been going for many, many years. Started with the French and went on and

04:00 Americans went in and now we were going in and that's what I vaguely remember about it anyway. We were given a job to do. We were the next battalion. There were three battalions over there at any one time.

**You went straight to Nui Dat?**

Yes. Straight to Nui Dat. We went into our four-man tents and

04:30 set up and that was it.

**Were they enclosed tents?**

Well, the sides were enclosed and we had sandbag walls in case we were actually being bombed or shot at. They were a little bit higher than the bed.

05:00 Just normal canvassed tents that we had.

**You had four stretchers in there?**

No, we had proper beds. Same as the beds the turfed out the window what I was stationed at Kapooka. It's ironic. We had mattresses and so forth. So we had somewhere comfortable when we come back from our operations to sleep.

05:30 **What would be in the tent besides the four beds?**

What we normally had was the beds, we had a locker each, we had duck boards, which is like a floor, and we probably had an esky full of soft drink. Then we had our mosquito nets and all that over it. That was it. Air conditioning we had, which opened up the flap, that was it. The mossies were a little bit horrendous at the night time. And the rain,

06:00 you could set your watch by the rain. Come 4 o'clock every afternoon, down it come. Sport on.

**For how long?**

Probably for about half an hour. Then going up to the kitchen to have dinner you'd be tracing through the mud.

**There were another two battalions there?**

Yes. There were

06:30 three battalions all up, plus you had support from one armoured regiment with the tanks and then you had cavalry there with their APCs and the Americans were there with their howitzers and artillery, helicopters. It was just like a complete set-up like a township. We had our own doctors, own hospital, own ambulances, own rubbish tip. The

07:00 only thing we relied on was the food coming in from the town.

**What were some of your first thoughts now that you were actually in the place?**

I suppose once we got into Nui Dat, because of the area itself, we really didn't get a very good

07:30 look at the terrain we were going to operate in. They had the actual base and it was all barbed wired. Then we had a kilometre of just sheer nothing, so if we were attacked, there was that clear zone where the enemy could be killed. Once we got involved and started patrolling it was just like a very antiquated

country. A country that's been set back in time.

08:00 We come across one village, the only village in our province of Phuoc Tuy province that had streetlights, but they didn't work. Just looking at the housing and the types of conditions they were living in. The rubber plantations, you could tell how they harvest the rubber, because nine times out of ten we would patrol through the rubber, they were actually harvesting the rubber at the same time. So we were more of a protection

08:30 agency in things like that. They were very antiquated. If you had money, you lived in the upper crust. In Baria itself, the streets were very dirty. There was no curb or channel or anything like that.

**Essentially you**

09:00 **were regarded as a peace keeping force on your way over?**

We were there as a peace keeping force or a policing force. Whatever you want to call it. We were over there to keep the North Vietnamese, the Vietcong, out of South Vietnam. We were allocated a province that was our, Australian, and that's the way I looked at it and that's the way we patrolled it.

09:30 **Can you give us a picture of getting to know the base and the detailed range of facilities on a day to day basis?**

Come into Nui Dat, normally, the only Hercules that would land was the American Herc, which had the twin engine. They'd normally come in

10:00 and then hit reverse thrust. Then you'd get out quickly, because they'd land and head off. We had SAS [Special Air Service] Hill. Where the SAS were, they were on top of that. Then we had the battalions just spread out. For Nui Dat we had one battalion, say, to the east of it and then another one

10:30 southwest and another one southeast. The rest was looking after by Americans and D and E Platoon and we also had a motel for the POWs [Prisoners of War]. They had running water and food and stuff like that.

**Actually on the base itself? A motel?**

Yeah, it's my pun, mate. Sorry. It was like a barbed wire

11:00 prison that had shelter in for the prisoners of war. We called it the motel.

**Why was that?**

It was just the sign that the military police had up. "Welcome to Nui Dat Motel", hot and cold running water, free meal, things like that. It just adds a bit of humour to the place. I thought it was very good.

11:30 The reason I remember all this is that my boys, I've never, ever shown them all my slides about Vietnam. They pestered me enough last week to pull them all out and we went through that. So it's good to remember things like that. And the boys got a kick out of it too.

**How many POWs would you have held in the hotel at any time?**

It just varied. Sometimes

12:00 they might have taken them straight to Vung Tau. They may have been two or three or more. A lot of them were killed in ambushes and things like that. A few were held there. Probably just for enough time to be questioned by the intelligence staff or the military police and then processed further down to

12:30 Vung Tau or Saigon or wherever.

**Did you have any mentors in terms of your training?**

No. None whatsoever. The only mentor I ever had was in my career as a referee, a rugby league referee. That was Bernie Pramberg those days. No, I've

13:00 always been a person that's given a challenge and head down, get into it. I wasn't frightened to ask questions either. People today will go and do the job, especially my eldest son, he'll go and do it and thinks he's right 100% because he's done it the way he wanted to do it, but not the way it's supposed to have, need done that the instructor may have wanted it. So no, I've never really had any mentors. I just got everywhere.

13:30 Registered lethal weapons when I do my assignments, I used to write them and she'd type them. Then she'd correct my English. You could look at her as being a mentor for me. But military side of it, no. There was no general I worshipped or anything like that.

**In terms of the**

14:00 **acclimatisation, how did that help you in the ops you were about to do?**

We went out for about a week, staying out overnight, where we were just working in close proximity of

Vung Tau, working in bamboo and things we were going to be exposed to in the longer run, and also the farmers and the villages and things like that. They just wanted to give us an idea

14:30 of what to expect. Our local barber that we had at Nui Dat, well, he actually got killed in an ambush. He was an actual VC [Vietcong]. There he was as a barber on our base. So you couldn't tell whether they were friendlies or non friendlies. The old cliché,

15:00 farmers by day and Vietcong by night. That was for the ladies as well. There were a few ladies that were killed.

**Did you have reservations with some of the Vietnamese that were working on base in Nui Dat?**

None whatsoever. I looked at them, obviously they had to pass a very stringent clearance of

15:30 security to be able to work on base. So I just thought, "They got through it so they're all right". Ironic to hear that he was killed. Can't trust everybody.

**What else did you do in acclimatisation?**

We practised our patrolling techniques, like

16:00 patrolling in close country like heavily wooded areas. You had different patrol formations compared to patrolling through rice paddies, patrolling along tracks and roads and things like that. It was just everything that we more or less trained in Australia, we were more or less put into practise except we were in a semi safe zone where we weren't going to really be

16:30 injured or hurt seriously, because it was pretty well a safe zone.

**How did your patrol formations vary across different terrain?**

Let's look at heavily terrained area. We were mainly in single file, one behind the other. Some terrains where there may be not as much timber and so forth we may go into arrowhead formation, which is just

17:00 shaped like an arrowhead with the gunner on the right or the gunner on the high ground. On roads we may be on staggered file, which is, I would set the stagger. So if I was in the right hand side of the road, the second scout would be on the left, section commander on the right, and so forth all the way back. Except for the gun. If the high ground was on the left then he would be up that side. We trained

17:30 in all that prior to going. And we had signals. If the section commander, if he wanted to say stagger file, arrowhead, whatever the case be, he'd just do the signal and we'd automatically go into that, that he wanted.

**That's a visual signal?**

Visual signal. Silent signals we used to call them. So the biggest thing was to keep an eye on the section commander, well, the person that was going to pass it down. Then it

18:00 would be passed down the chain so to speak. So everybody had to keep an eye on one another in case there was something sent down.

**Can you recall the visual signals?**

Yeah.

**What were they?**

"Staggered file" was just like that, meaning one on each side. Bearing in mind you had rifles so you always had your rifle in your trigger hand

18:30 so it was "Stagger file". "Arrowhead" would be like that with the weapon. "Straight line" would be a hand going straight up and down like that. Then it might be, "Gun group up that side" to the high ground. He would dictate where he wanted the guns to go.

**Were there particular cultural aspects of the Vietnamese,**

19:00 **witnessing them for the first time that made an impression?**

The Buddha did. I'd never, coming from Australia, not been overseas, you hear about they worship Buddha and all that sort of stuff, then you actually see it everywhere. Their little shrines with their incense stick and all that sort of stuff and they're praying and all that sort of stuff. It just opened your eyes a bit that there was other things other than the God that we believe

19:30 in.

**The training you received in Australia, acclimatisation seems to be the time you adapted that to your specific terrain and jungle.**

Yes.

**Were there new things that you couldn't have been prepared for in Australia?**

No, not really. Probably only the

20:00 people that we were dealing with, the actual Vietnamese themselves. The police over there were called 'White Mice' because they were just dressed up in white. If they blew the whistle and you didn't stop, they shot you. It doesn't matter who it was. So we had a little bit of a fear about those guys. That's what we were told, so we had a bit of fear about them. A couple of them, I know, have got killed by the

20:30 'White Mice'. We used to have a semi trailer come from Vung Tau with ice. In Baria he used to stand up on the box and he wouldn't move. The semi trailer had cut the corner, he didn't move off his box, so he ended up in the back wheels of the trailer. So we were advised for a while there just to be careful of them.

**If they yelled "stop" and you didn't stop, they would**

21:00 **shoot? That applied to Australian soldiers as well?**

We all thought that. As soon as they'd blow their whistle and you didn't stop, they'd shoot. And they'd shoot to kill. So we were just taught to just stop, look around. They were fearsome little people, the White Mice.

**What were your impression of the locals generally?**

21:30 I felt sorry for them and that's probably one of my weak points. I felt sorry for them. They'd had this war going for hundreds of years and they just couldn't settle down. The dealings I had to do with them in my time over there, I got on quite well with them. We used to have, when we'd go into Peter Badcoe Club for our R&R's, they'd make your beds and all that sort of stuff.

22:00 Then we'd play jokes on them and things like that.

**Like what?**

The classic example was, you'd be laying in bed totally butt naked and you'd hang off going to the toilet and Jolly Roger would be stiff as a board. When she'd walk in you'd throw the sheets back and she'd take one look and run. So you'd just laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh. Today you'd be in a lot of strife doing that.

22:30 **What kind of fun can you have these days?**

Well, we're pretty well limited, I'd say, to what we can do these days. They were things. It was just all in jest.

**It would have been quite funny.**

Yeah, it was.

**So you'd lose your shyness in the company of a large group**

23:00 **of fellows?**

I did. I keep telling you I'm a follower. They'd just go running out going, "Uc Dai Loi [Vietnamese for Australian] number one", meaning, "Australian bad [good]". But they'd wait till you leave and then come in and make the bed.

**What were you trained in regarding the**

23:30 **VC and NVA [North Vietnamese Army] before you went over?**

We were told they were regular battalions like reservists and regular armies. One was, "Fight by day and by night", and the other one was, "Farmer by day and enemy by night". They wore different uniforms and things like that. They were the main areas that we were looking at.

24:00 Just going on some intelligence, some of the operations that we went out on patrols on we would have an idea from intelligence on what regular enemy units were in that area. They were there, they were Phuoc Tuy province up the top end, they were entrenched in and around Saigon, Vung Tau and most places.

24:30 **I'd like to walk through day by day one of your six-week patrols to get a sense of what it was like. You'd spend quite a few days in preparation before you'd head out. What would you do?**

The preparation side of it, let's say the day

25:00 prior, before you fly out or whatever the case be. You'd be given what we used to call first line ammunition. We had 60 rounds each. That was our first line ammunition. The gun had 1,200 rounds. Then you had your grenades and your claymore mines. With your rations, what you'd have to do was break up your ration packs. Some of it might have been shit so you'd give it to your mate, he might have liked it.

- 25:30 You just try to make your load a lot lighter. Not necessarily go without, but just make it a bit lighter. People that didn't drink tea wouldn't take their tea. I didn't smoke, so I used to take my smokes to make a fortune. When they guys that smoked all their smokes, they knew I always had a lot of smokes on my back and I'd sell them. So they wanted to have it, let them pay for it.
- 26:00 We had our two grenades each. Then it was a matter of going out. You'd patrol for the day. You'd come in just before sunset. You'd be harboured up in what we call all round defensive position. We had guns posted. Depending what type of area we were in, whether we
- 26:30 were on full stand to. Just prior to sunset we'd send out what we'd call a clearing patrol. That would clear just 100 meters in front of us that we knew there was nothing in that area before dark coming on. Stand to, and then they would come back from the platoon commander, section commander, to stand down and the gun had to be manned. The gun was always manned with two people on it.
- 27:00 So what you do is you put your hootchie up, set out your bed, go to sleep. You'd be woken up just before sunrise. So stand to. Drop your hootchie, pack it all up. Sunrise a clearing patrol would go out again just to make sure everything was clear. Then you'd come back on again, stand to and then after a while you'd stand down. Then they may say, "Right. 50-50".
- 27:30 50-50 stand to means that, you'd work in two-man teams. Number 1 scout and number 2 scout, they'd be in one pit together. So one would stand to, lay in the ground in the action position, while the other guy would clean his weapon first and make sure it was serviceable, have a shave, have breakfast and then they would swap over. If he'd done it he would get in the
- 28:00 stand to position and then I would have a shave or whatever the case be. Clean my weapon. Then just wait for the orders for the rest of the day of what we were going to do. One night we were contacted. We just set up around some bamboo and the gun went off. The gun started firing and then we all got out of our beds and
- 28:30 started firing as well. We knew there were people there, but when the clearing patrol went out the next morning, because you never ever went out during the night, we waited till first light to get out there, all we found was a pair of sandals. That's all that was left. The people that we had, had killed or shot other people that came in and taken them out during the course of the night. They were like that. I can remember
- 29:00 where we set up a big ambush at Hoa Long and we killed literally dozens and dozens, and we had a multiple burial where they brought a dozer [bulldozer] and dug a big hole and put them all in that. By the end of the night and the day they'd been dug up and taken away for a proper burial by their next of kin. That's the type of people we were dealing with. So they obviously respected their
- 29:30 next of kin.

**The ambushes would be an integral part of your general patrol?**

It could be, depending on the information or the intel we were getting in we would set up an ambush where we would have, say the gun, that would be what we called the killing zone. Then we would

- 30:00 have triggers at either end of where the ambush was to let us know that it's been set off and full firepower just went straight into the area.

**What kind of triggers would you set up?**

Trip flare. As soon as a trip flare went off then you'd see the silhouettes and you had something to aim for. We mainly used the trip flares. Then we

- 30:30 may have used a claymore. If we had an ambush, then we may look at setting up a secondary killing zone where we thought they may escape with claymores and things like that. Always look at escape routes and things like that.

- 31:00 **In terms of rules of engagement, what were your instructions as a forward scout if you saw something?**

If I was in imminent danger of being shot myself, then I'd return fire. If I saw them before they saw me, normal enemy signal, and then we would go to ground and the section commander would either put up what we called a

- 31:30 snap ambush, which he would set one up quickly. The other one I spoke about was what we called a deliberate ambush, this one's a snap one. It's a quick one where there may be two enemy. It just depended on how many enemy there was. If there were two or three, we'd probably look at taking them on as a section. Any more than that we probably wouldn't look at taking them on, we'd let them go past. Then observe their movements.

- 32:00 **If you were walking through the bush and you see a couple of VC, NVA also walking through the bush in a different direction, how would you set up a snap ambush?**

That would be up to the section commander. For instance, we're going forward, they might be coming across our front. So he may get the gun group up to the side of me and set them up where as soon as they got to a certain point he'd say,

32:30 "Fire". Then we'd all open fire on them. All tactics.

**Was there much souveniring done in terms of VC or enemy that were shot?**

I believe that the Vietcong

33:00 held, we used to bury their dead the way people should be buried. They respected us for that. The only thing we would have taken off them would be any intel, like maps, weapons and stuff like that. We didn't pilfer, what I saw, we didn't pilfer watches or anything like that, that you see or may have heard of. No, I wasn't interested in having anything like that.

33:30 **The way you would bury fallen enemy, was it to subscribe to their belief in burial?**

No, we would just dig a hole, bury them. We'd know that later that day or that night they would come back and be resumed [exhumed]

34:00 and taken away from their proper burials. We wouldn't bury them six foot down like we do today. We'd just bury them deep enough where they'd be buried in the ground and put the dirt on top and just keep a mound there to identify there was a body there.

**If you were aware that VC, NVA would be coming back to**

34:30 **collect their own, why would you bury them in the first place?**

I may be their next of kin. Their mothers, their fathers, whatever the case may be. Nine times out of ten, probably ten times, that's who came back and resumed the bodies, was their immediate family. The only time that we would look at, normally they were just the "farmer by day and Vietcong by night",

35:00 those type. The regular army people were normally in bigger forces like companies, battalion type forces. These were just the part-timers, I'll call them. That would be resumed by their immediate next of kin, which may not have had any responsibility for the war whatsoever. So we more or less looked at that as...

**Was that a difficult thing to come to terms with for you,**

35:30 **the South Vietnamese who were forced to be VC at night?**

It was very difficult, you can probably put it in the same scenario as we've got in Iraq at the moment. They all wear the same clothes, they all have the same facial expression, same coloured skin, and

36:00 it's very difficult to be able to identify friendlies and so forth. But anybody after dark was classified as a break in curfew and was enemy. Don't get me wrong, I believe that the Vietcong also forced some villagers to fight in their cause.

36:30 Some of those ended up being captured and ended up working for us. We may take one out on patrol with us, one we had in the mine incident for instance. He was a Vietcong that thought "I'll change sides" so he changed sides and assisted us. We had full faith in them. We issued them weapons, ammunition, all that sort of stuff.

37:00 **Once they'd defected across there was no real thought that they could go back.**

One would assume that. Not assume, but home that. But I got really pally with one of them. It was hard to look at this young kid, we were the same age as a matter of fact, 19, we were both opposite sides and then we were

37:30 also, now we're on the same side. He was the same guy that pointed out the mine for me and where it was. So I'd buy him a couple of beers later when I caught up with him.

**I've heard some awful stories of what the NVA or VC would do to local villages in terms of forcing them to work for them.**

38:00 **Did you witness any of that?**

No, I didn't see any of that whatsoever. In the time I was with the battalion, we more or less just patrolled the mountains and so forth. We went through some villages, but the villages that we went through were more or less pretty close to Nui Dat and things like that. I never witnessed any atrocities against the village chiefs.

38:30 I know they did happen, but myself, no.

**That's fortunate for you.**

Yes. Yes.



## Tape 6

00:32 **When you did pickets at night, is that the same as an ambush? Would you always do an ambush at night as well?**

No. The ambush may only go for a couple of hours or we may stay all night. Pickets are definitely all night. Our pickets used to range anything from two to three and a half hours on picket as

01:00 a staggered rotation.

**How would you keep awake?**

Very difficult. Normally you'd whisper with your mate and things like that. Lots of noises, lots of things you start to hear. We used to have fireflies. They were a fly that used to emit a light.

01:30 It was difficult, but you learned to get yourself into a routine with it. Then we used to look at rotation of a time period. If you'd done the midnight shift from midnight to say two, then the next time you were on, you were on either the first or the last shift, so you weren't getting that broken sleep all the time.

02:00 It was something that you had to teach people how to do. Write up picket lists. Everybody would write up a picket list and give everybody the same time, but that person that works from midnight to two is going to get that broken sleep every time. Over a period of time they're not going to be any good to you. So you need to structure it such that everybody gets an equal amount of sleep.

02:30 **When you'd go off on an operation, since you were the forward scout, would you lead the way, or was it only you would be the forward scout when you knew there was enemy around?**

No, I'd lead the way. The section commander would say,

03:00 "We need to go in that direction". So I'd pick something out, maybe three to four hundred meters up that way and move up that way. He'd have his compass out to make sure that we were on that bearing. We had bearings we used to go by, certain areas that we patrolled. Then he'd take me on that bearing. Every time, depending what the orders were. I was in 3 Platoon, so if 3 Platoon was patrolling one of the other sections

03:30 may have left first and we might have been at the back end or something like that. But I was still first in the section.

**You got to know some of the black Americans. Did you get to know some whites as well?**

Not a great deal. We found they weren't as

04:00 friendly as the Negro guys. We'd walk into their bar and they'd say, "Aussie, let me buy you a beer." So naturally, you wouldn't stop at one, you wouldn't stop at two, you'd stay with them. Those days there was a lot of, I'll call it discrimination, between them. That became pretty obvious to me when I rejoined the army in '78, that a mate and I were tasked to move an American

04:30 battalion from 6 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] back out to Greenback. We had something like 21 odd trucks. The truck that I had, it was all dark fellows and they got on it. But a white fellow accidentally got on it and they physically threw him out of the truck onto the bonnet of the truck behind me and said, "You're on the wrong truck, white boy." Working with them now, which in my role as

05:00 risk management safety person, within a division, I've seen that dissipate. It's not there anymore. From what I've surmised as working with the ones I have, they seem to get on working well together. It doesn't seem to be any of that racial hatred that I seen going back all those years. Fro some reason, they

05:30 always got on well with us.

**It was at the height of a lot of the discrimination parades that they had in America.**

Yeah.

**That could have been embedded also in the army.**

Yeah. I think their demonstrations probably had hundreds of thousands more because they were

06:00 losing a lot more people being killed and wounded over there than we were. Then again, they were pretty well in the thick of it all where they were. I think that played a lot on it.

**We've hear a lot of black or white Americans doing patrols in Vietnam**

06:30 **smoking fags, listening to music, reading, all that stuff. Did you witness that?**

Yeah. Quite often. When that APC got blown up we had Americans with us. That's the sort of stuff that they were doing. I don't think it was rife throughout the whole US army, I wasn't sure.

07:00 Our training installed in us, no radios. The only time you smoked was when you were told to smoke, which was when we normally had our breaks on patrolling. No, I've seen them smoking and listening to radios.

**Did the Aussies say anything, "Hey, you're drawing attention to yourself"?**

No. The reason in our situation was that we were making so much noise because we had tanks and APCs with us

07:30 so, no, nothing was said to them at that stage. That's what I keep saying now, going back those days, my opinion was that we had the expertise in training, but we didn't have the technology, whereas the Americans were the other way around.

**It would have been better to amalgamate and work that out.**

Yeah. It would have been.

08:00 But that's hindsight. It's a wonderful thing these days.

**As forward scout you would have been the first one to be shot at.**

Well, I really didn't have that in the back of my mind. It depends on what was going to happen. Near in mind, we have our own tactics for like the deliberate and the

08:30 quick ambushes. The enemy would have had the same. I look at it, if they would have seen me, then maybe they would have set up an ambush and taken out. They all knew where the hierarchy was, the section commander and our fire support base. So they could have taken them out. In other situations we always looked at it that we would see them before they would see us. Bear in mind that we were

09:00 better trained and less with the regular army and NVA then. We had one of the platoons in A Company got into a bit of a strap with one of the regular army in NVA battalions, whereas he saw a machinegun that

09:30 was about to open up on him and he was the forward scout. He got a Military Cross out of that.

**Did you know of any forward scouts that got killed in Vietnam? Were you aware of any?**

Yeah. A couple were killed by their own soldiers. By their own forces. Sometimes the jungle was pretty thick and when you're trying

10:00 to wind you lose the sense of direction and you may end up coming back on one another. You'd be at the front and end up coming back on another. In some cases, tension's pretty high out there, and a couple have been killed by their own force. That's happened a few times. And others have stood on mines and things like that.

10:30 **Like those rear gunners.**

Yeah, on the back of the planes when someone fires, they're the first ones to go. But again, I have the philosophy that when your number's up, your number's up. I've still got that today. This cancer, obviously my number's come up, but talking to the specialist yesterday, my number's not yet.

11:00 **You'd be on edge when you were on picket, on ambush, on doing a patrol and sleeping?**

All the time.

**Did you sleep with your gun?**

Yup. Right beside you. If something happened of a night, you had to

11:30 know where it was, grab it and get straight into fire position and start opening fire.

**Did that ever happen?**

Yes. That's, earlier on, what I was saying about where we knew we had injured or killed people, but when we went back that morning we only found the thongs. I was in bed then.

**So you'd get up in your undies?**

No, you slept fully clothed. You

12:00 may have your boots on or off. Just depends.

**That always on edge feeling, I would think that would be the hardest thing to lose having been in a conflict.**

It's been some 34 years now since I've been in Vietnam and I still today,

12:30 if anybody, like a car backfires, I'll get palpitations. Or I may fall to the ground. My eldest daughter, Melanie, she came up behind me one day to sneak up on me and went, "Boo", and my action was, I'm ending up I'm hitting her and she fell to the ground. So I can't be startled any way whatsoever, because I just go into an automatic, I

13:00 won't say rage or anything like that, but my automatic reaction, once I start I can't get out of it. With Melanie I just punched her and the same with the boys if they've done it to me. I just can't take that type of startling.

**They know now, though.**

Yeah. But sometimes they'll still do it. But if I know it's happening,

13:30 a classic is balloons bursting. You may go somewhere where there's a function or a wedding and a balloon bursts. Again, I'll get the palpitation, so. But if I know that a kid's going to burst it or it's something and I see it, it doesn't worry me. Just be startled at it. I think that I'll never ever get rid of that.

**It makes sense when you've live like that day and night.**

14:00 **24/7 as they say.**

Yeah, 365 days plus.

**Something that's come up in talking with Vietnam vets, is the difference between wounding and killing. Some weapons were designed to wound rather than kill. Was the claymore mines one of those that you**

14:30 **tried to wound?**

We used to use claymores to kill. That was claymore four bearings and if you fired off a claymore you really didn't have any control over it to be able to wound people with it. The way we used it in ambushes and things like that, we were there to kill the enemy and that's the way we used it.

15:00 For wounding you probably would have been better off using a rifle or something like that. I have heard that there are some grenades that have a shockwave that, to me that's wounding. You're putting the off balance by upsetting their balance system in their ears and things like that. But the claymore mine was a

15:30 very lethal weapon. It was a weapon that the enemy learned to use against us too. In some cases they used to come in, if they'd known that, it never happened to us, but I know of cases it has happened that the enemy would sneak in. We would have a placing out against the enemy, we used to have a back blast danger area, a certain distance where you couldn't be behind it. We'd have them set out and they would sneak in, turn them

16:00 around. If you fired, all the ball bearings would come back into you, the Australian soldiers.

**Ball bearings, what would they do? What is the aim, to shock, to maim?**

I looked at them as when you get thousands of ball bearings hit you, it'd just multiple amputation the body. Just cut you in half.

16:30 Again, depending how close, if you were close to it, I would say your whole body would probably, there wouldn't be much left of you with all the ball bearings if you were point blank. They just come out, spurt out and they come up. So say you're five meters away, I don't think there would be much left of you. But they were more or less, to me, as a defensive killing weapon.

17:00 **What about 20 meters away?**

20 meters away, the bottom half of the body would be OK, top half may have a few holes. Again, it depends on how you set them up. Whether you set them up facing upwards. It depends how far you have them set to the trap where you want it. You may want to face them up so if

17:30 you had them it point blank facing straight across, you're going to take their legs off. If you had them angled in such a way then you would probably get them from the knees to the chest. So obviously you were going to kill them. Again it just depends on how you had them set up. What you wanted to appropriately have them used for.

**You would set them up?**

Yeah. Anybody in the section could set them up. The section commander or the 2IC [Second in command] might

18:00 say, "We have orders, we're going to set a claymore up here and here. Number 1, you set up that one and 2IC set up that one." Then he may come along and have a look to make, where we want them to cover the killing zone. We'd have what we used to call a clacker. It would come either back to the gun pit, remember the gun's being manned 24/7, may be

18:30 there, but if it's an ambush, it will come back to the closest pit where that claymore was.

**Were they used often?**

A fair bit. Around Nui Dat we probably had hundreds and thousands of them spread around the whole perimeter of Nui Dat.

**Would it be dangerous, if a man set them, that he would actually be blown up?**

Setting them? No.

19:00 The procedure was such that what you would do, it came in three parts. You had the actual claymore itself, then you had the det [detonator] plus the cord and you had what you used to call the clacker. The person that was setting up would have the clacker in his pocket. So you knew nobody was going to get this clacker and hook it up to the cord with the det. So what you do, you set it up in the position, you would put the det into the place where it's supposed to go,

19:30 screw it up and then run the lead back to your foxhole or where your position was and then you would put the clacker on it and then you knew it was live. Then you would set, it had a little safety switch on it, which is a little wire bar that you put on there. So if anyone pushed it down, it wouldn't go off. The procedure was, anybody setting up would keep the clacker in their pocket so nobody else would get that clacker

20:00 and hook it all up while you were actually setting up the claymore.

**Sounds like a lot to think about.**

Astonishing I can remember all this today.

**You did patrols for six weeks, but you could also do shorter ones?**

Yeah, just depending on what the operation was. We may patrol for a week or two weeks, then the rest

20:30 of the operation we might be at fire support base. Just manning guns and doing standing patrols and things like that. I can remember one fire support base we were at. We ended up challenging the locals to a game of volleyball. So we played volleyball and soccer. That was just part of the public relation. They used to flog us all the time, because God they were good volleyball players. They really were.

**The Vietnamese?**

Yeah.

21:00 They're short, but they can leap. Well, the games I played, put it that way.

**That's that white men can't jump business.**

Probably. That was it, because the fire support base was just outside this little township. Part of it is public relations. At all times, guns were still being manned and things like that.

21:30 You didn't fear too much during the day, but at night was when the fear factor came in. Not knowing who was out there and "farmer by day and enemy by night" and things like that.

**How long did you have to wait until you got leave?**

Normally when we finished an operation. Normally six weeks.

22:00 We went on three days down to Vung Tau. Then halfway, a bit over the six month period you got your R&R, which was seven days off and you could wither go to Taipei, Bangkok, back to Australia or wherever the case be. I came home to see Mum.

**After six months?**

Yeah.

**But after each particular operation you could have three days?**

Well, depending

22:30 on your availability, yeah. It was almost done like in a roster system, because the guns had to be manned during the day and during the night. So not everybody could go in one hit. So you might say, "You're going to stay back this week and next week you'll go down for your R&R or R&I [?]."

**Tell us about R&I. Would the first thing be to go and get pissed?**

Yup. No, sorry, first thing

23:00 would be to go and hand your weapon in to the armoury, go and get a shower, get into your civilian clothes, walk down, make sure you had your leave pass, walk down the front gate, grab a Lambretta, which is a three-wheeled motorbike, get as many of us in there as possible so we had power steering, otherwise the front would be off and you couldn't go anywhere, and then go down to the nearest bar,

but not get pissed straight away, but...

23:30 Have a few Bah- mee -bahs [Vietnamese for 33] used to come with the old Bah - mee- Bah which is their beer. Vietnamese beer. You either had it hot or cold. Cold was a glass with ice cubes in it that had all these funny looking things in them, and hot was just straight out the bottle into the glass. That was the way you drunk it.

**What does it taste like?**

All right.

**Balmy beer?**

Bah -mee -bah used to call it. Yeah, it was a beer.

24:00 Or you used to get the American beer as well. That used to come in cans and things like that, depending on what bar you went to. Once you'd had a couple of those then the young ladies would come around because they'd know you'd just come back from operations and the old cliché, hot and horny. So they'd latch onto you and get you aroused so much that really you couldn't say no for a short time or a long time.

24:30 **You told me they'd literally unzip your pants and stick their hand in there.**

Yeah. Pull your penis out, rub it up until you had a nice hard-on and they get you to that stage where they'd say to you, "Short time or long time?" You'd say, "Short time", so they'd take you away

25:00 and you'd pay the mama-san or papa-san the cost of a room. So you go in there. They had a timeframe where a short time was half an hour. So they'd time you going in and if you weren't finished in half an hour they'd be knocking on the door saying, "You finished mister? You finished mister?", and you'd have to come out. Long time means that you're going to stay overnight with them, which probably cost you a lot extra

25:30 upstairs. What they used to do, they'd take you upstairs and then you'd, I'll use those words again, rip one off so to speak, and then what they would do, they would go downstairs, continue working for short times and then when the curfew come about and the clubs had to close, she would come back up and then join you for the rest of the night.

**She must have had a lot of energy.**

26:00 **I guess they got to sleep during the day.**

Probably. The biggest problem, though, that we found, was venereal diseases. In those days, for the Australian male, the condom wasn't the in thing. So some of that did go about. But there were some very attractive young ladies there too, which

26:30 you just couldn't say no.

**I've heard there were some really beautiful women.**

Oh yeah.

**A mix of different...**

French, yeah. Very attractive young ladies. They'd sleep by day and work by night.

**That's where you lost your virginity?**

Yup. On a short timer.

27:00 **Were all the virgins there basically told by their peers to go and do this?**

Nobody knew I was a virgin.

**So you didn't tell anyone?**

Oh no, I was an Aussie male. At that age of 19 I shouldn't have been a virgin, but I was.

**That must have made you feel better then?**

Well, it was, well, yup, I've done it and

27:30 I've done it somewhere different. I was the one where you kept banging on the door saying, "Short time finished, mister". I was still going.

**Well, you were very young.**

I was 19, it was a newfangled toy I just found.

**That is amazing, the first time. You kind of walk out and you think that the world knows**

28:00 **for some reason.**

Mm. I don't think I was the only one, but nobody knew I was a virgin. I just made out I wasn't anyway. Aussie male.

**Did that become a norm for most the blokes?**

Yeah.

**To do that on R&R? So drunk, woman...**

A couple of times we went in and had a sauna first. There were a couple of places we could have

28:30 sauna massage. Some of the places you went, you went straight in, had a sauna, had a massage, because they're very good with their feet on your back and so forth. Then we'd go have beers and go to the dance. Get pissed, caught a Lambretta back. If you didn't want to go for long time, brought it back and come back again the next day, or stay in the hotel overnight.

**Did you do that? Did you stay in the hotel?**

Yeah.

29:00 **What were they like?**

Just a basic bed, that was all, that was above the bar. Set up like a brothel except you didn't have the hygiene as we have today. It was just a bed and a balcony.

**Would you get much sleep with all the noise going on?**

After a while you did. Once the curfew came about, the only noise you heard was the road patrols by the military police

29:30 in their vehicles, the Americans and Australians. Yeah. You had your little companion there, curled up beside you.

**Not the dog.**

No. Some people would have called them that, but no.

**I heard that some Australians actually made girlfriends of their women.**

Yeah. I don't know anybody personally that did do that, but I have heard that. I'm not sure I could have done that.

30:00 Not knowing, don't get me wrong, not all the ladies were into the red light district and so forth. There were ladies that I met that were teachers that were teaching over there and things like that. So I guess they probably got into that relationship. I think the Americans got it more than what we did.

30:30 I don't think I could have. I did have a girlfriend back here, but she didn't wait for me, so...

**Was that a Dear John letter [letter informing that a relationship is over]?**

Yeah. The day I got home on R&R she was waiting for me in Brisbane. It was upsetting in that time because I said to her, "You could have said to me over in Vietnam, I could have gone elsewhere." But Mum wanted to see me and spend time with me. In fact, I saw her when I came back from Vietnam.

31:00 She married the guy that she started going out with. I've got to be honest, I think I got the better end of the deal when I saw her some years later.

**Some things happen for a reason.**

Must have done.

**That would have been nice for the men if there were so many brothels set up there that they were,**

31:30 **in a sense, the interaction with the female, I know it was sex, but there must have been an element of actually being with something soft, because it was so hard, what you were doing.**

When you see a young lass there in a miniskirt that's barely covering everything, boots all the way up to the thing, heaps of makeup on and smelling really nice, that's something that you haven't seen for quite a few weeks if not months. They knew

32:00 how to attract us. But then again, sometimes if you'd say, "I'm not interested, take your hand off it" they'd sit there and talk to you, but not for long because they weren't going to make a buck out of you. Sometimes we would be interested that stage, but later on, or we knew someone else had a bar that we wanted to spend time.

**You could have someone you could see on a regular basis, couldn't you?**

Yeah, but then you could say also that everybody else was seeing her too.

32:30 Remember we were sharing these young ladies with Americans.

**I suppose it wouldn't do you any good to get attached.**

No. I really couldn't see myself getting too attached there with some of these young ladies. Much as I, very attractive, very attractive. One young lady got attached to me though. She was from the learning bar, for those people who know where it was. She'd come up to me early one morning when

33:00 the bar opened and said, "I like you." "Me?" She said, "Yes, I want a blond-haired, blue-eye baby from you." So she took me back to her own home, not the brothel, and we had sex. And it didn't cost me anything.

**You don't know what happened?**

No.

**You could have a blond-haired, blue-eyed, half-Vietnamese child?**

Could be. But, done

33:30 the deed, back to the boys. They shook their head and said, "Well, when you've got it, you've got it."

**Were you the youngest in your unit?**

Yes. Today, I won't say I cop flak, but I get looks from Vietnam veterans. They look at me and shake their heads because a lot of them now are in their late 50s, mid 60s and so forth. Here I am just turning 54 this year. They look at me and say "When were you there?"

34:00 Who were you with?" I go "Oh.... OK."

**They can be pretty tough, those Vietnam veterans, do you reckon?**

I think with a lot of publicity we've seen today with people that are falsifying, saying they've been to Vietnam, they haven't been to Vietnam and things like that. People probably get to challenge you. I maintain a very fit and active life.

34:30 Some people say that I don't look as old as what I am, but I just put that down to being very active and reasonably fit.

**We were talking about padre and you mentioned Father Duck. That was at Kapooka?**

No, that was at Puckapunyal. I remember Father Tinkler.

35:00 He was our battalion padre in '68 and I used to love going to his church services because he used to put in the four letter adjective as part of his sermons. I think that was his way of getting his quota. It was really good. I quite liked him. The little bit of religion

35:30 I was exposed to was mainly Sunday school where, "This is what you've got to learn, Jesus this and Jesus that", and that wasn't for me. Whereas Father Tinkler, he structured it another way, which you'll probably say came down to our level, but I think it was his way of getting the way he wanted to present his message across. It wasn't every sermon or anything like that he had it, it was just

36:00 the right word at the right place at the right time. I'll never ever forget him.

**Were the Salvo's [Salvation Army] there?**

Yes. I will always donate money to the Salvation Army. We, as a family go regularly over to the hotel over on Bribie Island here and the Salvos come around and I'll always give them the shrapnel [change] from out of my pocket because some of the places I've come out of and here's a Salvation Army guy there

36:30 with cold cordial, biscuits, chewing gum and stuff like that.

**Come out of the jungle you mean?**

Sometimes we get what we call a 'resup' where we'd be, resupply of rations. So we'd have a landing zone for a chopper to come in to drop it all off and he'd be on it with his cold cordial and all that sort of stuff.

37:00 What would happen was, he may stay with us if the chopper's going back to pick up another load. He'd stay with us until the last chopper would leave and then he'd go back with them. So I have a lot of time for the Salvos. Even during our training, even today with the Salvos we have supporting. They're a private organisation, they do it all themselves, I don't believe they're supported by the services,

37:30 which is a shame. There's a lot of times where you'd be hot and you've wanted a cold drink and all of a sudden you get to this point and here they are, all set up ready to go.

**The Second World War blokes often talk about the Salvos as well.**

Yeah. They're worth their weight in gold, they really are.

38:00 **Friendships that you formed in Vietnam, you said you weren't in touch with that so much anymore. Was that because the whole time there was so intense and a part of you wants to forget it and you cut off from the friends?**

No, I think, because I got out in 1974 I had four years where I was living in Southwest Queensland and

38:30 everybody was in North Queensland. By the time I rejoined the army again and by the time I got to North Queensland they'd all gotten out. Some of them weren't actually servicemen. When Mr Whitlam got in any national servicemen was given their discharge straight away and I think they just packed their cars up and left. I know a couple of them ended up in jail on drugs.

39:00 They got into the wrong scene when we got back from Vietnam.

**A few people have said they would have wanted to rejoin because the army felt like a safe environment for them, but they didn't. Was that your driving motivation was they know you?**

I think they, and we also got on

39:30 well because we were all the same age and we were all drinking buddies together and we all went out together and things like that. I think, for the national servicemen that wanted to rejoin, they were under a lot of pressure from their fellow national servicemen, "What do you want to join that organisation for?" so they didn't get to do it. They didn't rejoin and so time goes by, it's very difficult for

40:00 them to rejoin again. I think a lot of them had other careers. Talking about Dennis the school teacher. As soon as he got out he went back to teaching school, being a school teacher. There are a lot of the national servicemen that did stay on. They found it was their bread and butter and they enjoyed it. So good luck to them.

40:30 End of tape

## Tape 7

00:36 **Can you tell us about the patrol you went on when things**

01:00 **got a bit too close to the bone?**

Yeah. That was the one where we'd harboured up and we'd come out. I was the lead section. We were just working as 3 Platoon.

**What was the brief for that particular op [operation]?**

We were just going to patrol the track to another location where we were going to harbour up there for the night. So we were just patrolling these track systems through the mountains. We knew they were being used.

**Was is a short,**

01:30 **or one of your longer patrols?**

It was one of the six week jobs. I think it may have been our second to third week into it when this happened. We're patrolling along and I saw this like a big rock that's just there. When I come back around you could see it was shaped as like a cave. So I just propped and got the

02:00 section commander up and Old "Toad" had a look and said, "That looks like an enemy camp". The platoon commander brought the rest of the platoon up, put them into all round defence and then I continued the patrol into the area. That's when I started palpitations. Knowing it was an enemy camp, you wouldn't know what was set up there booby trap wise.

02:30 After a while I'd been through and cleared it all and a couple of more came in then and we got the food, cash and ammunition and we destroyed those.

**What booby traps could you expect?**

A panji [bamboo stake] pit for instance. I don't know whether you've seen where they dig a pit and have bamboo sticks

03:00 pointing up and they had a poison on them. They just have a loose cover of earth over the top. They'd have those setups. They could have it mined, they could have a tripwire across, they could have had mines and things like that. It takes quite a long time to actually clear one of those areas. Normally, in this case it was just myself that done it. I was already just on the edge of it, so



03:30 once they came around, then I continued into it. We found all this stuff.

**What is walking into a spot like that? What are you looking for?**

You're looking for, for instance, we came across the fireplace. They'd obviously been there that night, the enemy,

04:00 because they used to cave as overnight shelter. You're looking at, this is where your tracking comes in, you're looking for signs, which way they would have went and things like that. So the signs I found was they were heading down the track, which was later where we would head off to, which they had mined, which nearly killed me and also could have killed a few others too,

04:30 because we were just moving out so we had nearly sprung out to our full patrolling order. So it had the potential there to kill a few of us.

**You were getting a bearing on where they may have gone.**

05:00 **What tells you they have gone in a particular direction?**

You probably put yourself in their mind. You may look at it as if, "If I was here I'd probably go out that way". You start looking in those areas. You start looking at anything that may not be natural to the area. Maybe a tree there that the shrub's been

05:30 broken. You break a branch on a tree, after a period of time it starts to wilt and so forth. So if it's just been snapped and it's still reasonably healthy condition, obviously it's only just happened. But if it's been there and it's wilted - they're the type of things you look for. Those areas you're looking for, if you look at

06:00 a rainforest where you've got the ground has a lot of foliage on top of it. If it's been disturbed it will have a different colour. I don't know if you've ever noticed it or not. So you can tell there, "OK, that's different to the rest of the foliage, so something's been dug up here, or something here, or there's a footprint", or whatever. They're the sorts of things you're looking for.

**The Vietnamese had a particular**

06:30 **footwear or footprint?**

Well, yeah. The part timers used to use car tyres with a couple of straps. They used to call their thongs. The regular army had the normal boot. We'd look at car tyre treads or they may be slicks. Normally they were wearing thongs in a lot of

07:00 our cases.

**Did you come across where they tried to trick you or giving you false signals?**

No. I, personally, not. The only time we ever come across was with that mine, which nearly killed me. No, not really. I just look at, either I

07:30 missed it and didn't pick it up, or they didn't do it. The only thing they did do, in some cases, I know, they turned the claymores around. Instead of facing out on them, they turned them inwards. So if you did fire them, you're on the end of it.

**It was a claymore you stood close to?**

No. It was a Jumping Jack mine with the three prongs. I saw it.

08:00 I still see it plain as day today, just the three prongs sticking out from the foliage I was just talking about. It was just a broken twig that had like the point was pointing, and a certain distance from that, there's the mine.

**How far would the broken twig be away, normally?**

In this situation, probably about ten inches. They used to have set distances where they used to plant their

08:30 mines. If it wasn't a mine, it may be another mine sign. It may lead to another one. So they were very cluey people when it comes to doing that. But they didn't perform to the Geneva Convention and have it marked and signposted, like we're supposed to do, or we do. Minefields, you've got to mark them and signpost them to say "minefield".

**Around the perimeter of it?**

09:00 **Not to tell you where they are, but just to say...**

Yeah. This area's mined.

**Of the Jack that you saw on the ground, how far were the prongs protruding and how big are they?**

They're probably protruding out of the ground two centimetres. They try

09:30 and hide them with the foliage. If you have a quick glance you won't see it, but if you look at the broken twig and then you look at distance out from there and have a look, then you see it. That's when we brought the guy. He just brushed the shrubs away and we had a close look at it. So we marked it as a mine and dilly-hopped off back to our position where we were that night and called in the engineers to come and blow it up. To no avail though

10:00 When we went back to blow it up they'd dug it up and took it away. So obviously they'd been there watching us, or they'd come back again to stay the night and realised nothing had happened with it and took it away.

**What is going through your mind when you're walking down the track and you catch sight**

10:30 **of the twig?**

It was just something that I saw out of the corner of my eye. I don't know why I looked or why at that time there I'd stopped and had a look down. I don't know why, but something made me do it and there it was. What went through my mind was, "How many of these others are around? Am I in the middle of a minefield? Have I got the guys here?"

11:00 All those things start to go through your mind. So once we realised, this is where we bring the other young fellow up. He says, because he's Vietcong, "There's one here, one over there, one over there", whatever the case be. But there was only one here. That's why we had him with us.

**Was in particularly unnerving to**

11:30 **realise the next day that it had been dug up and taken off?**

Yeah, it was. Because I'm thinking that if we'd have done something about it, not saying that somebody else was going to be killed by it, but you don't know. If we'd have done something with it like somehow blown it up ourselves, it wouldn't have been dug up and reused again.

12:00 That just wanders, goes through your mind. "Was it used to kill another Australian? Was it used to kill another American? Or the Vietnamese friendlies that we had working with us as well?" You just don't know.

**In the day or so that followed, what was going on for you?**

I went through a huge

12:30 what-if stage. It starts playing on you. "What if I'd stayed a little bit longer here? A couple of seconds here? What if I didn't look down? What if I was a little bit over there and stood on it?" After a while that starts playing on your nervous system and then after a while

13:00 I just said, "Enough's enough". I had to get out of the forward scouting for a while, so I did. They put me into the rifle group. So number 2 becomes number 1 and one of the riflemen slips up into number 2. I think a couple of days after that we ended up going back to Nui Dat. That's when I was taken from there to the defoliation team.

13:30 Those days there was no psychological help available to you. You just had to learn to deal with it yourself, whereas today those services are available to people that have been exposed to something that was horrific and may have that psychological value on them later on.

14:00 I think a lot of lessons can be learned from Vietnam to today's current overseas deployments and things like that where all these things are available.

**What did you say to your CO?**

To the section commander? I said, "Look, "Toad", my nerves are playing a bit of havoc at the moment." He said, "No worries, Lester. What I'll do is I'll put you back in the rifle

14:30 section, put you down the back." "Toad" was very good about it. He knew. That was his second tour of Vietnam. "Toad" Dunshea. He'd been there and learned a lot of valuable lessons. So he was very good.

**When you got back to Nui Dat you still felt**

15:00 **you didn't want to go back out.**

Yeah. "Toad" kept close eye on me and then that's where the battalion had to supply a person for this defoliation team. Our company got chosen to supply that person and I'm the one they got noted for it. Whether that's a godsend or whatever you want to call it with my problems today, I don't know. I

15:30 got attached to headquarters transport company as part of the defoliation team.

**Was it difficult to go out of your platoon and leave some of your mates?**

Yeah, that was very hard. I felt I was letting them down a little bit. But they also said, "We understand what you're feeling because of what had happened to you.

16:00 We'd be in the same boat. We'd feel the same as you." It was because you thought, "You're letting them down because you trained all these years to fulfil this position and now someone else is going to come up to this position to do the job that I was trained to do." Then again I also had the feeling of knowing that I wasn't going to go back

16:30 out on patrols again for a considerable period of time. So that gave me time to regroup and rebalance, regather my thoughts and things like that.

**You mentioned how there was no counselling help in Vietnam. How did you deal with it by yourself at that stage?**

At that stage I probably

17:00 drowned it with alcohol. Not to the stage where I couldn't do my work or anything like that, but when I'd finish work you'd have quite a few drinks and so forth. Then we used to sneak it back to our tent and keep it in the esky and things like that. But I never ever drank while I was out doing the job. So you just learned after a while and then

17:30 after a while there was no pain after a while. So I just thought, "That's another one gone. I've got to get over that." Then again, when the APC blew up, that retriggered it all. I was back out again and then when me toenails came off and I'm back I thought I'm back in the safe environment again.

**What did you know about the defoliation team before you**

18:00 **joined it?**

Nothing. Didn't even know it existed. So when I got there I met the other two guys that were there and they told me what the job entailed. Then we used to mix this defoliant in a big 1,000 gallon tank. Used to come in powder form in a big bucket. Then we used to tip it in, drive the truck, brake, that stirs it up and then we used to have a VW [Volkswagen]

18:30 motor on the back of it and two spray guns. One would drive, the other two would spray out the back. Within a day the stuff would start wilting. So that's how potent it was. We had no, like today, workplace health and safety requirements of commanders and leaders and so forth, I personally wasn't warned or shown what safety gear to wear,

19:00 whether it was toxic, hazardous, whether it was going to cause my health and things like that.

**So there was no briefing or instruction about the stuff?**

No, we'd just get a daily schedule to say, "Go and spray this patch". So we'd go and fill them up, put it in and go and spray it and get ourselves covered in it.

**What was the label on the side of the drum of the stuff?**

19:30 All I saw was it had D455T written on it. That was it. I really didn't read the labels or anything on it. I just assumed that everybody else was doing it, That was all right. Bearing in mind we were out there spraying, it was in our clothes, in our hair, on my boots. So we had to go back and wash our clothes. We were breathing it in through the hot water we used to steam while washing our clothes and all that sort of stuff.

20:00 I believe I've inhaled a fair bit of it.

**Did it have a smell?**

It did, but I couldn't put my thumb on it at the moment of what it smelt like. Every time we came back from spraying we were saturated because there may have been a wind blowing and you might be spraying, but you couldn't actually spray with the wind because you'd be outside the perimeter. So you'd be spraying against the wind, so it'd be

20:30 all coming back on you. Also, for those that were out on patrols, they used to get sprayed by the aircraft who would come down low and spray over the trees and kill the foliage underneath the trees.

**Did any of you at any moment consider, "Well, if that's what it's doing to the vegetation, it's maybe not the best thing"?**

21:00 No, we knew what it was doing to the vegetation. But I personally assumed it was safe because there was nothing there to say anything else, that it was harmful to swallow. You weren't going to drink it. But knowing what you do today that's taught you that all this stuff can get into your body through inhalation,

21:30 drinking it and all that sort of stuff, through the pores of your skin. So obviously I've ingested a fair bit of it. It'd be interesting too to see about other guys. I've lost track of the other guys, how they've come on as well.

**How extensive were the spraying operations you were doing?**

Pretty constant. The truck was on the road five days, seven days at a time we might be working, to do it all.

**Acres and acres?**

22:00 Oh yeah. The whole perimeter of Nui Dat. Some of it was very overgrown and you had to get in there pretty quick because it was growing in between the wire and all that sort of stuff. So you didn't have that clear observation out through the wire to see if any of the enemy were coming through. It was one of those very important

22:30 jobs that had to be done.

**So your principal brief would be, "Keep the perimeter clean"?**

That was it. Keep the weeds down, keep the grass out. Once it killed it, it killed it. Took quite a while for it to grow back if it ever did. We used to get a lot of requests for defoliation jobs around the airfields and things like that. It wasn't only around the wire, also around

23:00 the airfields where the grass was getting tall, so we might have to do the bottom end of the airfield and all that sort of stuff.

**Basically it seems you were a unit of weed killers.**

We were, not just weed killers. We still had, everywhere we went we still had to take our weapons and all that sort of stuff. There still may have been the opportunity. In some cases we may have had to go outside the wire. There was

23:30 certain ways of getting out of the wire to be able to spray on the outer perimeter.

**How would you get out of the wire? Through the gate?**

Yeah. There's set areas, designated exit points which only the Australians knew. Normally they're manned by a military police or a garrison military police person.

**Was it like a bit of the fence was peeled back to allow you to get through?**

24:00 No, they had a proper exit point with a big gate and things like that. It was manned during daylight hours. It may have had a gun picket on it at night.

**How much did you know of how extensive the defoliants**

24:30 **were being used, not just around the perimeter, but elsewhere?**

We didn't have very much dealings with the people in the aircraft, but we knew that the aircraft were spraying the exact same stuff as what we were. We were told that.

**What were they spraying? Was it landing zones? Were they trying to**

25:00 **hit particular VC?**

No, they were spraying rubber plantations. What they were trying to kill was the foliage in the rubber plantations themselves and any other foliage that may have harboured enemy hiding spots and things like that. What I know today, it's nasty stuff. I believe it's banned today anyway.

25:30 **How long were you doing that?**

Nearly six months. Six months I was continually exposed to it. So I say I have it in my system. But it's not recognised by the government, so...

**Because...**

Well, Agent Orange is not classified as a substance that

26:00 causes defects in births and cancers and things like that. That's what I'm led to believe.

**Have you tried sending them your toenails?**

No. Doctors have seen my toenails, but their hands are tied as well. That's why I'm hoping to have this toxicology report done on the lining of my stomach when the surgeon removes that in a couple of weeks' time. So hopefully it may indicate,

26:30 show, I'm not sure how they do it, but they can do it to say that the stuff that causes cancer is the stuff that you actually spray. I have heard that it can be done. They can narrow it down to the type of chemical So we'll see.

27:00 **You were sent back to platoon?**

Yeah, I went back to platoon. They were getting short on reinforcements, so they said, "We've got young

Mengel over there, defoliation, so we want him back." I got so comfortable at that stage that I kicked the muck and tried to stay, but I

27:30 knew I had to go back. I went back. I went out on one patrol, probably for about four or five days where we monitored this house and then we got news that a young company driver had accidentally shot himself in the wrist cleaning his gun, so they knew that I had a licence. This is within A Company. I had a license, so I was given the job of

28:00 becoming the company driver. That kept me from back out in the field a little bit, which was good.

**The fellow who accidentally shot himself in the wrist, there's been stories of people shooting themselves in the foot to get an early exit.**

Yes. That's the rumour that went around with this young fellow. I can't prove any different.

28:30 I have heard that he was having girlfriend problems. The quickest way to get home was to accidentally shoot yourself. But that's only hearsay that I've got that, but that was from a pretty reliable source that was in Vietnam at that stage.

**What about other fellows who didn't cope well with**

29:00 **their tour? Did you see fellows who weren't coping with their time there?**

One member of our defoliation team, young Wright, he went home on R&R, back to Australia, and never ever came back. He went AWL [Absent Without Leave] whilst on R&R.

29:30 That's how, I'm not sure what happened, but he just didn't show up. So he was classified as AWL. Whether something happened back in Australia, I don't know, I still don't know till today whether he did go away or something happened that he couldn't come back to Vietnam or what. But I knew he was having problems. He didn't like it. He didn't want to be there. National serviceman. So he

30:00 didn't come back after R&R. Other cases, you just had to learn to live with it. You know, that was it.

**Some fellows obviously couldn't.**

Yeah. Some people couldn't. We also had a situation over there, I know of one incident, where if your

30:30 command element of the company of the platoon wasn't performing and you thought they may be endangering you, they may leave a grenade pin under his pillow with a little note to say, "Rest will follow", things like that. I've seen that first hand.

**Can you expand on that?**

Let's say that a young lieutenant for instance is not commanding the

31:00 platoon. You know how I said I felt comfortable with you guys earlier, you get that with your leaders within the sections or platoons as well. Obviously somebody didn't feel comfortable with him, he was making poor decisions and they left a grenade pin underneath his bed and just to say, "More will follow if I don't brighten your idea."

31:30 Very frightening. So that was one way of saying they weren't happy with the way you were performing as a leader.

**Did he make it through?**

I don't know. I believe he did. But it was something that he probably needed a wakeup call to say, "This is how". I also believe he was having a lot of personal problems at home with his wife too, so that has a

32:00 bad conflict on the way they're interpreting the way you're performing and things like that. Very worrying.

**At the time it's all about what's happening in the moment.**

Yeah, that's right. You put your life in the hands of these people and if you're

32:30 unhappy. I had no problems with our platoon commander, sergeant, section commander was quite good, Mr [Lieutenant] Petrie, he was only with us for probably half the tour. He had to be flown back to Australia. Problems that he had at home I believe.

**When somebody would come in to reinforce, at a**

33:00 **CO level, would that take a bit to trust a new person?**

Yeah, what they tried to do was, "Toad" Dunshea I'll use as a classic here. He was my section commander. We lost our platoon commander. Jimmy Doyle then become the platoon commander. "Toad" Dunshea then was promoted to sergeant.

33:30 So we try and keep everybody internal to keep that harmony within the platoon. The only thing different was that the section commander we then got was Cliff Bond. He came from another battalion. In those days, when the battalion was to go home, you could ask for an extension. You could get an extension of another 6 months. So they would transfer you to the next battalion that would be going home in some months' time. So we ended up getting Cliff

34:00 Bond, who was an Aboriginal.

**How did he fare?**

With me, personally, I wasn't that fazed on Cliff. This house I was talking to you about that, the other guy and I on a gun. We were laying dead still, the calm of night. You're listening for noises in the house. So you just lay still to see if you could hear. After a while you get to hear

34:30 one of those breathing. He came up behind us and he accused us of being asleep, especially me, and wanted me charged. So "Toad" Dunshea and Jimmy Doyle had a chat to him and explained to them what we were doing was we were so quiet, we were trying to listen. It didn't go any further, but I had no

35:00 respect for the man. When we came back to Australia I saw him once. He had been busted down to a private soldier and was an alcoholic and all he was doing was mowing lawns at Cunungra. So that's going 30 years now. Some 30 odd years that I saw him.

**With the house you were keeping an eye on, it was touted as a VC...**

35:30 Yeah. It had a bunker underneath it. Today we know they were very good tunnel rats, the Vietcong, that they can dig and dig and dig. We knew that something was going on in there, but we had to catch them in the action.

**This was a house in the local village?**

No, this is the house in, I won't say in the middle of nowhere, it was in the middle of two villages.

36:00 Very isolated. If I was there I probably wouldn't have picked it because it stood out like a sore thumb and is something I probably wouldn't have used. But it obviously had a significant value to them for some reason. They had to have known we were there because there was a whole platoon of us up the back.

**How were you received by locals**

36:30 **on the occasion you'd go through villages?**

Good. "Hook de loi number one", meaning, "Strange soldiers number 1", meaning, "Top guy". You couldn't fault them for being friendly, but the spots changed of a night time and you're probably their worst enemy of a night time in some cases. A lot of them respected the Australian

37:00 soldiers being over there. But you just didn't know who was friendly and who was enemy. So the guy that was saying, "Uc Dai Loi number one", may also that night put on his pyjamas and be the enemy.

**The Australians had a good reputation amongst VC?**

Yes.

37:30 **Did that translate for you on the ground?**

No, not really. I really didn't give it a thought. Most of this I have found out after the fact, just by things that I've read and things like that, of Mr Mackay, he's written numerous books on

38:00 Vietnam and he's received the Military Medal and all that sort of stuff for going to Vietnam. He often goes back over there and he often has dinner with the enemy commander of the opposing side now that there's no more war. I don't know whether I could do that.

38:30 I tried, but what happened was that we were asked to do a tour of Vietnam. What we tried to do was, because I'd been there I was just going to do like a self-conducted tour, but we had to get approval of the new embassy in Canberra. When I spoke to the lady concerned

39:00 she said, "You're a member of the defeated side." So I just slammed the phone down in her ear. She's put me off ever going back to Vietnam.

**That's not the thing to say, is it?**

No. It wasn't. But because I didn't want to do one of their tours, their tour shows you all their tunnels, their hospitals and whatever. I wanted to do a tour of what I'd been exposed to,

39:30 shown what was left of Nui Dat, Vung Tau, the beach, all that sort of stuff. She said, "You were on the defeated side". Yes.

## Tape 8

00:33 **Comfort packages, did you receive any of those?**

No, not really. Mum would set us over some home cooked biscuits and things like that. By the time they travelled over on the old Jeparit, which was a merchant ship, they used to bring over our supplies, they'd be stale. No,

01:00 not a great deal.

**Did you hear about that punch-a-postie and punch-a-wharfie campaigns?**

Definitely. It was punch-a-wharfie in my, I was in Vietnam in the days wharfies were refusing to load the Jeparit, which had all our supplies. So that's where we came about punch-a-wharfie. Punch-a-postie I didn't hear much of,

01:30 but the wharfie I did, because of the Jeparit. They refused to load it. There were different organisations in themselves. Dealing I've had with them today is that, when the Australian army got the new Leopards we went to pick them up from the wharf down in Melbourne and the wharfies wouldn't let us

02:00 go and pick them up off the wharf. They had to be taken to Puckapunyal to be taught how to be put into first gear, reverse gear so they could drive it. So my opinions haven't changed that much of the wharfie organisation.

**I suppose they're a pretty strong union.**

Very much. Very union orientated.

02:30 They've lost all credibility with me and I hold a grudge probably for a long time that the ship that supplies for the forces when we were in Vietnam, they refused to load it because of whatever the dispute was. They just lose all credibility for me.

**They're taking care of the**

03:00 **middleman, it's not actually making an impact on the right people.**

Yeah, the impact was on us in Vietnam. I don't know what impact they were trying to install on people back in Australia, but I'll tell you what, they made no friends in us over there when we heard. That's when we came up with the motto punch-a-wharfie.

03:30 **I wonder if anyone did.**

I don't know. It'd be interesting to find out, through.

**Who unloaded all the stuff?**

That was unloaded by the ship staff and so forth. The ship's crew are trained with their

04:00 cranes. Normally, in Australia, the wharfies would load the ships.

**Were you an avid letter writer?**

No. I wasn't an avid letter writer. However, I did write a letter. One of the guys had a friend that wanted a pen pal in Vietnam, so I said, "Hey, I've got nothing to lose, a Dear John letter", so

04:30 I wrote probably two letters a week to her. Mum got upset because I wasn't writing enough to her. So I got to know her pretty well. When I came back from Vietnam I drove all the way down to Melbourne to spend some time with her and her family and came back to Brisbane again. Just a pen pal.

**It didn't eventuate into anything?**

No. It was just, I think that

05:00 I looked at it as somebody to write to of the opposite sex. Nothing was going to come with it. But I thought, "Meet this person that I've never met that I've been writing to for five months, four months", whatever it was. So I drove down there and stayed a few nights with her and her brothers and sisters and her parents. I've forgotten their names already.

**How did you know that it wouldn't**

05:30 **eventuate into anything?**

To me, if you want to be a pen pal, pen pals were just someone that used to write to one another. That's the way I took it anyway. Maybe deep down behind me I thought something may become of it, because I unloaded a lot of my thoughts onto her about Vietnam, what was happening at the time and things like that.

06:00 [...]

### **What about Aboriginals in the army?**

Yeah. Apart from Cliffy I got on very well with them. We all wear the same coloured uniforms, we done the same job, we just had different coloured skin, that was it.

06:30 At my time in Vietnam there weren't that many Aboriginals in the service at that time. But there's a lot more now and I think it's great. Some of them are getting up into the command elements, sergeants and officers and things like that.

07:00 **You hear the rumour that perhaps this bloke shot himself, do you think the army now, when they do psychological assessments of the recruits look for that?**

I'm not sure whether they would pick it up.

07:30 From what I can work out with this guy was that he went home on R&R, left on a sour note, I think he was married with kids, left on a sour note with his wife and the only way he could get back, remember those days the compassionate situation wasn't, you really had to have a very good reason to be sent back home. I'm not sure whether he ever

08:00 spoke to anybody about it, but the easiest way of getting home was to shoot yourself, nothing that was going to be long term. Again, I only heard that, but it was from a reasonably good source at that time that that's what he done to get out. I had no reason to doubt his word or judgement on that.

### **The air force called it LMF,**

08:30 **the Low [actually Lack of] Moral Fibre. Did you witness anyone who had LMF that wouldn't go out through fear?**

No, not in the time I spent in my platoon, no. Whether anything happened when I was away for that six months on the defoliation team, I don't know, but they were all there

09:00 when I came back. I'm sure that if somebody had a fear of something and they didn't want to go back out, maybe they wouldn't have sent them back out. I know on one occasion in particular that on operation one of the guys was going to turn 21 so they didn't send him out on the operation. He stayed back as what they call rear duties, doing the gun pickets, working up in the kitchen and all that sort of stuff. So he could celebrate his

09:30 21st birthday. To me, we had commanders that had a compassionate strength about their style of leadership, which was good.

**Did you have one of those calendars of a woman with 365 days and then you get to the 365th day and you end up on her fanny?**

10:00 No.

**Do you know the calendars I mean?**

Yeah, I know the calendars you're talking about. No. I didn't have one of those. I was too busy. I didn't know where to get them from. I knew how many days I had left. I just more or less had it written up on a piece of chalk on a box, saying, and then you get down to the week and then you had to take all your pills before you left.

**What pills?**

10:30 You had to take a series of tablets, because you had been over there for such a lengthy period of time there was a series of tablets that you had to take at a certain time each day. One in the morning and one at night. I think it was maybe to kill any bacteria that may have been in your system from mozzie bites and all that sort of stuff.

**Did many of the men actually get malaria?**

11:00 Not that I know of. I know a few cases today where people have got Ross River Fever, whether that's another word for it I don't know. No, not in my time of the people I was associated with.

11:30 **The defoliants, you said they came in huge gallon...**

Barrels.

**Did you have to dip your arms in them?**

Yeah, that's how we used to put them in. We used to put it in barrels with scoops or whatever the case may be. They were pretty heavy to

12:00 put them up so you put a scoop in it and obviously your hand went into it and you threw it into the tank. No gloves. Going back to what we know today to those days, you wouldn't do it. But those days we didn't have the necessary procedures in place or to know what



12:30 this stuff, it's like asbestos. Greatest thing ever invented. Who knew 30 years down the track that it was going to be a horrific taker of lives? I just put this down as well, may not be as bad as the asbestos, but to those people who were heavily exposed to it, I believe there is that type of illness that

13:00 we've developed. Should be somehow compensated by the government if proven. But I have no doubts. I've got photographs, I've got everything.

**Can you recall the smell of napalm?**

I had nothing ever to do with napalm. Napalm is probably not

13:30 a favourite weapon of mine. It can't select who it's going to kill and you saw a lot of documentaries on TV when napalm was used and it killed innocent people. It has its effects, used the right way, but it's not a weapon that I would use unless I was 100%

14:00 total that it would kill who I had set out to kill. But we saw that it's not selected. No, I've never ever smelled it. I probably didn't want to get that close to it.

**Are there any movies that have been made that realistically depicts**

14:30 **what happened in Vietnam?**

No. Not really. I've watched that movie with Graham Kennedy about the SAS.

**The Odd Angry Shot?**

Yeah that's it. I thought, "What a load of wallop that is". I know it was shot down at Cunungra and all that sort of stuff, but no. Some of it's a little bit, but no, I've

15:00 seen the SAS in Nui Dat and no, not like that, I'm sorry.

**Did you become mates with men outside your platoon?**

No, not really. A couple of us that were in A Company, I went to defoliation team, another guy by the name of Brian

15:30 Wruck, another well known RSM within the army some time ago, he became a garrison military policeman. So we kept in contact with one another, I drove out the gate, called him some names, so. He was a garrison military policeman, he thought he had more power. Wruckie was all right. He was a good man.

16:00 **The brawling and drinking that went on in the army, did that happen?**

In the army or in Vietnam?

**In Vietnam, that continued on afterwards?**

I only ever got into one. Before we got into the fight, believe it or not, we set out all these rules. The first one that drew blood was the winner.

16:30 So I took my teeth out, put them on my bed so we had a stoush, I had a little graze above my right eye so we called it quits then, he won, so we went up and had some beers together. It was over something, sheer stupidity. I can't even remember what it was. I just remember it was stupid. It really was. But it just got to the stage where he challenged me and I said, "Yup, let's do it." I wasn't going to damage the

17:00 fangs, so. There were brawls, there always will be when there's alcohol involved. But it didn't degenerate to the stage where anybody was going to pull a weapon or a gun on your mate, not that I had seen or heard of in my time in Vietnam, because you lost out on a fight or he was going to get the upper

17:30 hand or whatever the case be.

**Did you see any of the drug taking that happened quite frequently with the Americans in the Australian army in Vietnam?**

Look, drugs was readily available to us. You go and buy a packet of smokes today, that's the way you could buy it over there. You go and buy a packet of cigarettes which was marijuana and stuff like that. I don't mind. I tried it, but because I'd never had

18:00 a smoke, I never knew what it tasted like, it done nothing for me. So I didn't do it anymore. It was there, it was readily available, and I think in some cases that probably led to the downfall of a couple of my mates that ended up in Stuart Prison on taking drugs. Vietnam vets of mine.

**Stuart Prison is where?**

In Townsville, Mount Stuart. That's going

18:30 back '73, '74 that they got done for drugs and ended up in prison. I think they probably dabbled in it

over there and got the taste, because they both smoked it and got the taste for it. Whereas I never smoked, I couldn't see what they saw in it. So maybe I had the wrong expectations of what it was supposed to do to you. No,

19:00 never tried it since, or smoking.

**The mental state it seems became part of you after almost killing yourself with this mine, can you trace it back to that day? Can you trace flashbacks back to before then? Have you had flashbacks?**

Yeah,

19:30 I can trace them back to the day I was shot at, that day, and the day I was blown up. I can remember them vividly, whereas other things I can't even remember. And the toenail episode where I got up, got my socks off and there they all are. I probably don't get as many

20:00 flashbacks anymore, probably because some of the medication they've put me on. I still have restless nights, not sleeping. Jude will attend to that, that I'm a very light sleeper, extremely light and anything wakes me up. There's one thing I can do, I can just go like that and fall asleep.

20:30 Put my head on the pillow and out. You're trying to get every bit of shut-eye you can, so after a while you learn to put your head on the pillow and to go to sleep. That's followed me right through. Another thing is, in the army they'll say, "You have 20 minutes to eat dinner", and all that sort of stuff.

21:00 Today, I'll finish a meal and people may just be halfway through it or a quarter of a way through it because I got to that stage where I digest it pretty quick. People look at me and say, "Are you hungry?" "Oh no".

**Have you slowed down at all?**

No. Jude reckons that once I retire from the army and all that sort of stuff, she's worried about it because I keep myself

21:30 rather active with army reserve, my job and also the maintenance around the house. Even my ashman [?] is worried about that too, when I decided to call it quits working, what am I going to do to occupy my time. I don't see it like that. I didn't think there was a problem with me anyway, but I've got to rely in their judgement and that's the way they say

22:00 I'm going. So I'm thinking about that when I do decide to retire, maybe starting a little consultancy business and keep active like that, working three days a week or something like that. Just downscale and hopefully leave the business to my son, Jason, who's into safety in a big way, much to the disgust of his school.

**What do you mean he's into safety in a big way? What does he do?**

22:30 At school for instance, fire hydrants and fire extinguishers have to be tagged and tested every month. He might walk past one and have a look and he'll go and tell the teacher. "Teacher, look, that fire hydrant hasn't been tested or tagged." And they'll go, "Yeah?" He's in primary school on Bribie Island and they had sand over the cricket pitch, but the cricket pitch was exposed. He went to the principal and the principal said, "Thank you very much

23:00 Jason, I'll get another truckload of sand and put it on." He's always doing that. He's either going to go into the military or he's going to follow my footsteps in safety. By ensuring he has something to fall back to is starting up a consultancy business. I believe I've done the networking and have the contacts to be able to start.

23:30 **You mentioned that you spent a lot of years recruiting. Your personal judgements of people and how you go on first impressions, if that became a major part of your decision with recruiting, how were these assets**

24:00 **used for your role in the army after Vietnam?**

1981-1986 I was in the 1st army recruiting, detached in Townsville as a field recruiter. Even some of the other guys in recruiting, after a while the people you talk to, you can pick the people up that, I'll use the word cliché,

24:30 bullshitting to you and things like that. But they've asked to join the services, you can't say no. You can try and talk them out of it, so what you do, you give them an application form and you do up a card on them. Then you just write on the back, "May be inconsistent with information being provided", and things like that. Those were the days when if you had a record, you weren't allowed to join anything dealing with, especially

25:00 drugs was a big no-no. When asked about records or drug convictions it says, "No", however, may need to investigate with police report. We used to do police checks on them and things like that. Then I used to have anybody that was married, male or female, in joining the army, or in a de facto relationship, or engaged or steady girlfriend, I would not talk to them until they

- 25:30 brought their partner in as well. Because I had once, where we listed the person and I got the blame for not telling the spouse on the time they were expected to be away, 12 weeks at Kapooka and all this sort of stuff. So I made the decision then that I will only talk to both of them. So I thought that if they're keen the spouse needs to be supportive of, whether male or female, that they need to be supportive of them making this decision.
- 26:00 There are a couple of cases, I used to recruit Cairns, as far as Mackay, that was our main area, after a while people will come up to you, you might be recruiting Thursday night, late night shopping they come up to you smelling of alcohol, pissed to the eyeballs and want to join. And they're adamant that they want to join. So, OK. You give them an application form, but
- 26:30 you say on the back of it, "This person showed up extremely intoxicated, probably would not do a follow-up with them", and things like that. You get all types. Then go to the other extreme, I used to be invited out to the James Cook University and I used to give presentations on our undergraduate schemes for lawyers,
- 27:00 engineers, surveyors. One day I got a request where I had to go up to the Roman Catholic seminary where I had to interview one of the local ministers up there. It was his turn to serve his time in the services. Apparently, I'm not sure whether it happens today, a certain number in the clergy in the Roman Catholic are required to serve in the
- 27:30 services, army, navy and air force. So I went there and spoke to the gentleman concerned. I ran into him later and he was still in the army as a chaplain. But those years, I enjoyed those years. [...]
- 28:00 **Tell me if you've found this in the army that men respond to a very stringent hierarchal form of structure to get them to do and learn things.**
- 28:30 **Women respond more to gaining trust before being told what to do. You have to make friends with women and you don't have to make friends with men.**
- I have seen that, but that was a long time ago. I think what they've done now is
- 29:00 put a lot of strategies in place where if you've got the goods, you'll succeed on your own. We have a lot of situations now where we have reports written on you every 12 months. The person that writes that report needs to identify whether you have the qualities to become a leader. Then they should put you up and recommend you, irrespective of whether you're male, female or black,
- 29:30 white, oriental, if you got it, you should be given all opportunities. I believe that would be today because there are a lot of ladies now, a lady I work with in my new job now, Colonel Woodrow. She's a female colonel. Once upon a time you didn't see too many female full colonels. Now, I must say, like a dime a dozen like the males, but there's more of
- 30:00 them being promoted because they have the goods to be able to succeed and they're getting rewards for their hard efforts on their chosen careers that they are in. In the old days, if you wore a skirt, I'm sorry, you weren't going to go anywhere. That was very hard for the girls in those days. I'm talking about in my
- 30:30 Vietnam days and early when I rejoined in the '70s. It was unheard of to have a female driving a truck because she couldn't never ever change a tyre. Those days have changed now and we teach them how to change tyres and we teach them how to be able to lift the tyre up and be able to put it onto the tyre rack themselves. Once we taught them the easy way to pick up, I've seen some women grab and pull it off without a blink of an eyelid.
- 31:00 **I could probably work it out, but may as well get some dumb bloke to do it.**
- You could try that, but you wouldn't have gotten me because I thought, "You want equal pay as me, you do it yourself". But yes, you would bat an eyelid and a guy would say "OK, I'll give you a hand".
- Depends what field of work you're in.**
- That's right.
- 31:30 **The recruiting was something you really enjoyed. Why were you taken off that?**
- Normally, in those areas, you only spend two years. I'd spent four years. If I want to get promoted then I had to get back to my corps, which is Corps of Transport. So you had to move out of those areas.
- 32:00 Believe it or not, I wouldn't be accepted in recruiting today because I have a tattoo. They've got some very strict guidelines today for recruiting in the services. You can only enjoy a good thing for so long. If I wanted to be a sergeant in my 20 years, then I had to get back out and become a transport operator. So the job became available and I took it and got promoted to sergeant.
- 32:30 **With promotion comes higher pay?**
- Yes. Higher pay and a heap more responsibility too. It was ironic that I got promoted into the 24 RAR sergeants' mess. The RSM of the battalion those days was my old section commander, "Toad" Dunshea.

So it was excellent for him to present me into the mess as a senior NCO [Non-commissioned officer]. It was good.

**Is he still alive?**

Yeah. Kicking around somewhere. I believe

33:00 he's got out of the service now. Yeah, he's around somewhere. I try and catch up with him on Anzac Days, but I'm unable to track him down.

**Back in Vietnam you were telling us about the APC that went over a mine. Can you tell us about that day?**

Yeah. On that day we came across an obstacle. The obstacle was this creek crossing. They'd blown the bridge

33:30 up, so it was delaying tactics. What we had to do was, we had what we called a bridge carrier with us. It's a tank that has a bridge and hydraulically comes out and just fits across the creek, dismounts it and then you ride it and then he goes across, picks it up and so forth. It takes quite a bit of time to really put this thing into place. So in the meantime you've got people going back

34:00 and forth and in those days they used to have these big anti-tank mines, where you might drive across it 15 to 16 times and they might have it set at the 18th time is when it's going to be detonated. So they try and pick an opportune target they know where they're going to cause the maximum damage, which is trying to get hold of your command element. Except it backfired on this day. We're sitting there and we're just

34:30 facing out. All I heard this mighty 'Ka-boom!' and I'm showered in dirt and rocks and my ears are ringing, I can smell smoke and everything else. I thought, "What the hell was that?" I turned around and here was the APC actually sitting on the backend of a tank. Probably half a dozen guys laying out in various states of shock and broken limbs.

35:00 Whilst all this current activity was happening, people had a cas-evac [casualty evacuation], which was bringing in helicopters which are special helicopters, I'll use the same as MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] helicopters that come and pick these up and that them back to the hospital and so forth. At the same time this was happening we had engineers sweeping with mine detectors around our tanka and all that sort of stuff. Then we had to make sure that my APC that I

35:30 was on that we weren't on top of a mine. It normally happens that when you move off it may come up and explode and things like that. After being shot at, another mine and this mine, it got me down at that stage. But I looked at the guys that were laying there. Nobody can go and treat them because you don't know whether there's any more mines

36:00 laying around. So they had to lay there in various states of agony before somebody could get to them and give them first aid in case there were other mines around. It's something you've really got to see to believe. To see what can happen, what can be caused

36:30 by mines and things like that. To see those 6 guys laying there and not be able to do anything really puts a lot of pressure on you. There's nothing you can do, they just lay there, in a really bad way in some cases.

**Did any of them survive?**

Yeah, they all survived.

37:00 They were all flown back home, but they had all various serious back injuries. Some were crippled and things like that. They were part of the defence platoon that was coming out to provide protection for us to go out to do the defoliation of those rice paddies. Just

37:30 to see the carnage that it causes, even the APC driver and the way he was positioned in between these two front doors. He was just laying there. I honestly thought he was dead. We couldn't get off our APC or do anything to go and render first aid because it hadn't been cleared by the mine detection team and things like that.

38:00 So that was the first priority was to get the area cleared, get the LZ [Landing Zone] cleared to bring the chopper in to take them away and then administer first aid at the same time. Then we just continued on some time or other.

**What would have been the most difficult part, not being able to do anything?**

38:30 Yeah. It's hard. Somebody standing beside you can get shot. You're there straight away, you're putting on a pressure bandage, you're talking to them, reassuring and so forth. But this situation, you've just got to listen to them moaning and groaning and crying and yelling for help and things like that.

39:00 That just hangs with you for quite a while.

## Tape 9

00:35 **We talked about religion as you were growing up and your philosophy of, "If your number's up, your number's up". Was there a connection between your faith and your belief in terms of being through Vietnam?**

01:00 I think there is. The reason I say that is that for whatever reason, I don't know what, I looked down at that. I'm not a religious person, I believe, yes, there is a God, but I'm not a practising Christian or anything like that. So he through that day, he wanted me to stay.

01:30 I can't put it down to any other reason why I looked down there. I didn't trip, I didn't.

### **God just keeping an eye out on that day.**

I think so. Also, that second mine incident with that APC, we would have had to run over it, in the position where we come into, we would have had to run over it. So whether

02:00 we were the last ones to run over it because of the other APC, or whether we'd run over it and a couple of other people had run over it before it triggered, who knows? So that's my philosophy, my number wasn't up, he didn't want me to go just yet.

### **You mentioned your three strikes belief. Did you feel you could have pushed the envelope by sticking out?**

Yes,

02:30 I did think that. I thought, "OK, I've got my three strikes now. There's my three narrow misses." I said, "The fourth one's going to kill me or that's it, nothing else is going to happen to me." So, as it turned out, I was exposed to nothing else. Nothing else happened to me. I'm right now. I've still got that philosophy

03:00 today. I had a series of friends and acquaintances of mine, not last year, 2002, where eight of them had passed away within a period of about 6 months. Just friends and acquaintances. I had 3 strikes and I said, "That's number 3, that's it." But my treating physician,

03:30 John Vincent here on Bribie Island, he passed away of cancer of all things, and he's my treating doctor. I had to go and get another doctor. Then other acquaintances that I had known had passed away. We had a person killed up the road here, but also part of my job in this new role as safety officer and risk management for the council is that I attend

04:00 fatalities. The reason I attend is that with the litigation the way it is today, we have to prove beyond doubt that the road or the signage wasn't a contributive factor to that death. So I went to this one and it turned out to be a sergeant that I knew from one of the army reserve depots here in Caboolture. My best mate, last year, this was the last one,

04:30 Tom Kenny, his 21-year-old daughter, she just celebrated her 21st birthday. Two months after that she passed away. She had a massive brain haemorrhage at work and she never regained consciousness, so Tom and Judy made the decision to turn off the life support system. My three strikes in a row, really, was over, increased

05:00 2002. It got so bad that I had to go back and see Ashmin [psych] because it really was playing havoc on me at work.

### **In what sense?**

I went to another fatality where a mother and her ten-year-old child were killed out at a place called Nalimba. In that car accident there was the mother, the child and four pups were killed.

05:30 It wasn't a head on it was a head and rear, nose-tail. They were coming from Nalimba into Caboolture, raining, 100 zone, she lost control of her Ford and a 4-wheel drive coming the other way doing 100, she lost control. So the back of her car was head on into the 4-wheel drive. The young lass in the back wasn't wearing a seatbelt, she was with the pups. When I got to the scene of the accident I saw the

06:00 ambos working on her with CPR [Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation]. When they stopped you know that there is never ever any hope of her regaining consciousness. That played on me a lot. I can go to fatalities and not worry about an adult being killed, but when a child is killed, that plays a lot of havoc on me. I'm going back to work, I rang Jude

06:30 just to talk about it. I just started crying while I'm driving. So I regained my composure and got back to work and I went into the boss and said to him, the same thing, I burst out crying, I couldn't stop at that stage. He called our counsellor. She came and spent an hour with me and then I went and saw my guy. We have

07:00 critical incident debriefing with proper counsellors, but this little girl affected me in another way than I've been affected before in seeing death. Probably because of girls my own, and I've got two boys.

**That principally tends to bring things like that**

07:30 **right home.**

It does. Other situations, we had to set up traffic control around the fatality accident. This guy had received a phone call from his daughter's work and involved another head on collision between two vehicles, a 4-wheel drive and another sedan. This Dad had received a phone call saying that his daughter hadn't returned to work.

08:00 He came up to the traffic control point where our guys were and said, "Do you know what people", we knew what people were involved. "My daughter hasn't showed up from work and she's driving such and such a colour car", and stuff like that. We knew that she was the deceased in the motor vehicle accident. We said, "You need to go up and speak to the police." That put a big burden on the guys that were dealing with that traffic control there as well. What they

08:30 normally do, they come back and brief me and I get onto counselling and so forth. That scenario also affected me too so I went along to the critical incident debriefing. I couldn't be a police officer now, or an ambulance officer or a fire. I fully support them 100% in what they do and I think they should be supported more.

**Do you think your experience in the military and particularly in Vietnam**

09:00 **has helped you or even hardened you to be able to deal with that?**

It's ironic. I've seen people been shot, I've seen people that have been stabbed, I've seen people killed in traffic accidents. Prior to 2002 I'd never seen anybody hung. I had a phone call from one of our workmen. He

09:30 was filling up his water tank and we found a guy that took his own life in one of our pump stations. I went down and while the police were waiting and I was going down there as well. I saw, OK, thought I'd seen them all. I think that I've been exposed to, yes, it has hardened me, but then again I think it's also made me realise

10:00 that the sheer stupid things that come out of what people do while they're driving and not wearing seatbelts. I just look at all the other lives that they've affected. This young fellow that hung himself, all the lives that he's affected, not only mine, but policemen, the ambulance officer. This young workman. He was only a young fellow. He still has dreams about it today, about this guy.

10:30 We were there for two hours because the police wanted to talk to us. The police arrived, then they brought in the forensic crew that take the photographs, then they had to bring in the scientific branch because it could have been a murder-suicide, things like that. That's one of our work stations. I try and avoid that place and so does Mark. Because the first thing you see when you get there is the

11:00 branch that he hung himself on. I've probably gotten off the track here a bit. I think it has, but I think it's also made me more compassionate towards the people that are affected after the fact, the workman and things like that.

**Is it similar in terms of flashing back to some of your experiences of Vietnam?**

11:30 **Is it that clear?**

Yes. I'll go through a thought process. Sitting here having this interview. The incidents we're talking about, I can see them. As I'm talking about it, sometimes if I close my eyes when I'm talking about it, I can just see it as if it's over there. That's what I feel about when I drove past this guy that hung himself, I can see him,

12:00 I shouldn't be so callous, but I can see the length of his neck and things like that. It's extraordinary to know what happens to a person's neck when they've hung themselves. I've never seen it. That's a flashback when I drive past it. So I try and avoid that road when I can. Even the fatalities I've been at, especially the one where the young lass was killed, the young girl,

12:30 I'll drive around the main highway and things like that.

**I'll bring you back to...**

Back to Townsville?

**Back to Townsville coming back from Vietnam now. You've mentioned the welcome home parade. Did you have any way of expecting the reaction from the locals?**

13:00 We were warned about it. We were warned of the situations that there were elements of the crowd there that were there to heckle and in any way disrupt the parades. I should have stated very early in the interview that it was a very small element. 95% of the people there were there to welcome us back with open arms because a lot of them were relatives and all that sort of stuff.

13:30 Townsville was very supportive of the military at that stage. But there was this rogue element in there

that threw the tomatoes, threw the eggs at us and threw paint. I wore paint over me. I just thought, "What bother".

**How did that make you feel?**

Angry. Very angry. It makes you so angry that you just

14:00 want to move out of ranks and find the person that done it. But they were so gutless anyway that they hid. They came from buildings and things like that. They didn't want to be exposed and caught by the people that were actually there welcoming us back. There were people there that protested by banners, that's fine, that's a peaceful protest. But they didn't need to, the other element didn't need to throw paint or anything like that.

14:30 We were all very remote. We got back to Lavarack Barracks and we were ready to change into civvies [civilian clothing] and go back.

**And look for them?**

And look for them. We didn't know who they were, but we were going to find someone. But we were calmed down and came to our senses and said, "OK, but we'll remember this" and you do. You remember it. You're proud as punch because

15:00 you got two medals on your chest. A brand new infantry combat badge. We were the first battalion wearing it. You felt proud, because you came back alive. There were a lot of people, guys that were wounded were marching. They've been through a lot, and to have this done to you, I often wonder today what these people are doing today, whether they're in politics or what. Maybe I shouldn't have said that, but I think...

15:30 **So you did find out who some of them were?**

We had an idea.

**How did you calm down as a group? Was it some of your senior officers debriefed you?**

16:00 No, military police, "If I see you guys in town, I'll arrest yous." Fair enough. So they defused us, the situation. They knew that we were upset. So were they. They couldn't do anything about it because they couldn't catch them. They knew it was happening but there's nothing they could do about it. But we were just going to go back. We had an idea where it was coming from.

**Had you lost any mates in**

16:30 **Vietnam?**

I lost one. He wasn't a close mate, but we were acquaintances. Believe it or not he died of leukaemia. A married guy. He came back from R&R. I said to him, "Mate, you're looking pale." He said, "I'm feeling off.

17:00 I'm not feeling well." Got him to the doctor, some weeks later he passed away with leukaemia. He didn't know he had it.

**That was quick.**

Yeah, obviously he'd had it for a while and being in Vietnam obviously triggered it off, made it grow faster or whatever. Leukaemia, how it comes about and so forth.

17:30 **Was that a part of your anger towards the crowd of people who weren't responding well to you? One, it's about you having come back alive, but it's also about the guys that didn't make it back.**

They didn't come back. I suppose you've got a very valid point there. I've never looked at it that way.

18:00 I just looked at it as, what we've gone through. We all went through, not just my team, but everybody had gone through a life-threatening situation. That's one, being in Vietnam with was a life-threatening situation. They may have been exposed to have a mate that was. There was quite a number of fellows killed in the 2nd Battalion. I think yes, we're marching

18:30 back, they're not with us, they're being brought back to Australia, they've been buried with full military honours funeral and all that sort of stuff and they have these degenerates do this to us, I think was just a little bit out of order. If I'm 53 today, they were, some of them would probably be

19:00 politicians now.

**I'd love to ask you who.**

Not that I know any of them.

**Tell me about your experience with the RSL [Returned Services League] when you came back.**

RSLs. We probably had a very unfortunate experience with the RSLs when we came back, one being the Townsville RSL I went to join. I was a

- 19:30 baby face, I'll admit that. I had just turned 19 two months prior to going to Vietnam. We were labelled as, "That was a peacekeeping force, a policing role. That wasn't a real war. You don't know about it, young fellow." I joined, but we weren't really made feel welcome in the RSL. So when my
- 20:00 membership had lapsed I never ever rejoined another RSL again. You could probably call it sour grapes on my behalf, but I've joined other football clubs or surf lifesaving clubs because there's no memorabilia or, "What were you doing in Vietnam?" Or "What war were you at being an RSL?", and things like that.
- 20:30 Whereas football clubs is football and surf lifesaving clubs is surf lifesaving. You go there to relax and have a ball. So I never joined. There's one thing I promised myself, that I will never ever treat a serviceperson, being politically correct these days, in regards to when they come back from Timor, Rwanda, Cambodia, Iraq, I'll never treat those people the way we
- 21:00 were treated by RSL. Irrespective of what role you served in a war zone or a theatre of war, which these have been declared, you deserve the full accolades that go with what you've done.

**What about the government itself, not necessarily welcoming vets back. Did it have any impact on you at the time?**

It did.

- 21:30 It probably triggered a lot of thing that have happened today between Jude and I, as I was telling you during the breaks about when she gave me the ultimatum. The welcome home parades, the first one in Sydney I couldn't go to because I was tied up doing the promotion course as an instructor, but the second one in Melbourne, and who was the boffin that was taking the salute? Can you remember?
- 22:00 I call him a boffin, but those days he was the prime minister. It was Mr Bob Hawke. I looked at Bob Hawke and I thought, "Here's the Labor party and what does the Labor party stand for during that Vietnam era? Anti-war, anti-this, anti-everything else and here he is up on the dais trying to take the salute." He got the salute all right. He got the royal salute like that from most of us.
- 22:30 Keith Payne, VC [Victoria Cross], went up. I got on with Keith pretty well because he came from Mackay, same place Jude was, and I got to know him in Mackay. So him and I and another mate of mine, Tits Tyson, got on the hootchie chooch really bad and we really got smashed. We had a concert put on
- 23:00 the next day and I was too crook because I was severely hung over. But, all we done was just spoke about Vietnam. I'm not sure whether that opened up a lot more wounds. Keith Payne got the Victoria Cross for his gallantry work. Tits Tyson is a good mate of mine, he was a medic in Vietnam and that's all we spoke about. We didn't speak
- 23:30 about the guys that were lost or anything. Maybe we were talking left handed Dutch after so many beers and so forth. I will never ever forget the welcome home parades put on by the Labor government and for what the Labor government stood for in those days that we were in Vietnam. To me it was just a vote getting exercise.
- 24:00 I still hold strong thoughts and reservations about that.

**I've spoken to some Vietnam vets who felt it was a good day. But hearing your story, I'm wondering if it was that salute that actually made them feel good.**

I think that. It made me feel good. Because what was his motive for doing it? I don't know. If he could tell me, I'd love him to tell me.

- 24:30 What was his motive? Who put him up to it? Was is a PR exercise to gain sympathy votes? I'd love to know because he was the wrong person to be on the dais to take the salute. Could have been anybody else. Could have been the governor general, it could have been anybody else other than the Labor prime minister for that day. It could have been my wife up there taking it. I don't care. Anybody else.
- 25:00 A lot of other people felt that way. Don't get me wrong, it was good to catch up with old mates, but we brought up a lot of stuff that I probably had sunk a bit. I'd learnt to put them down, but now they were back up. Don't get me wrong, I still have very good memories of that, that bit I do have have.

**Did it unsettle you a little after that?**

It did. Jude says, prior to that I had obviously learned to cope, but she said after that something happened to me. She said, "You just became a fair right bastard". That's the only thing we could put it down to was that welcome home parade. Maybe it was seeing Bob Hawke up there that made me so

- 26:00 angry that it just brought all this stuff back up. Who knows? But I've now sought help and I'm on the straight and narrow.

**Had you, since you came home from the march, had recognisable ill effects from your time in Vietnam?**



Not

- 26:30 really. Medical-wise I have severe heartburn, which turns out to be one of the problems I have today. I had a lot of bad dreams where I might wake up screaming and shouting and carrying on. But they diminished over the years and the years got on. Other than that, no. It's just been my health
- 27:00 and my dreams. The dreams now, I no longer have flashbacks dreams of Vietnam as such, of what I've been through. But they may be something totally irrelevant, stupid things. Sometimes I wake up and have had a bad night with bad dreams, but I can't remember what the dream was about. Poor old Jude, she normally wears,
- 27:30 I break out in cold sweats and normally we've got to change the sheets and the pillowcases because they're saturated with perspiration.

**Some of those dreams came back after the march?**

Yeah. Definitely, well and truly after the march, but they're still happening today. Not as often. We also, on that day,

- 28:00 all Vietnam veterans and their spouses were given free entry to a big concert that they had there. So when we went to get in, all the bouncers said, "It's not free for anybody. You've got to pay to get in." We were up in arms then. Punch-a-bouncer was another one. They hadn't been told that this was the policy that Vietnam vets and their spouses, Jude could vouch for it, we had to pay to
- 28:30 get into this concert. We kicked up a huge kerfuffle. We were going to kill these guys, because that's why most of us were there. The first day was the welcome home parade, big night on the wally, talking, whatever we were talking, and second day was meeting up with all our spouses and kids and that sort of stuff and we were going to the concert together. It was going to be one of those concerts that we used to have in Vietnam. It was just a
- 29:00 bring back the old days, the old concerts we used to have. Here were these big, burly bouncers saying, "You've got to pay your ticket". Like hell we were. Somebody went and got confirmation and we were let in for free. We would have ripped the fence down, that's how angry we were.

**Once a stuff up...**

She just snowballed, mate. Run by professionals it was.

- 29:30 I always look back to the man standing on the dais.

**It comes from the top down.**

That's the way we're taught and there's not too many COs will accept the losses done by their middle management type people.

**What about Anzac Day?**

Anzac Day is a very difficult day for me. Not in regards

- 30:00 as to, I've only started marching now in the last nine years. The kids are the ones that got me to march. In Mackay there's a school up there called the Fitzgerald Primary School. I used to march with the kids as a proud Dad, Vietnam vet, I'd march with my two sons. They've got me back into it. Now that they're in high school I go.
- 30:30 Jason's in the Queensland University regiment army band so I'll go with him and do all the dawn services and so forth. They'll do their march and I'll march with the 2nd Battalion. But it's very tearful for me. I've really got to fight the tears on the march. Everybody clapping saying, "Well done, well done". The emotion in me really comes out and I start to, I just can't stop crying.

**What do you**

- 31:00 **think it is?**

It's not anger, it's happy. They're to say, "Thank you", but I've not been able to control my emotion. We're being thanked for the job that we done. Then I'll come home and we'll sit here and watch the news at the table. Once upon a time, sorry I'll finish up what I'm saying. I'll watch the news and I'll be watching the parade. I'll sit at the table and cry.

- 31:30 The boys have got used to it now. "Are you all right Dad? Mum, give us a tissue." "No, that's fine, son." But going back to the Anzac Day, one of the reasons we didn't march Anzac Days was, Darrell Ward, a mate of mine, he's another Vietnam vet, infantry that went to transport, him and I come morning of the parade, him and I will be legless. I'll ring Jude up, all the dawn services we get hem, we'll still be in uniform

- 32:00 and so forth. I ring Jude up and I say to Jude, "You might come and pick us up". We'd either be sitting in the gutter waiting for her, or laying in the gutter sleeping waiting for her, or leaning up against a

telegraph pole. But we were happy drunks. What we'd do is, Jude will take Darrell home and she'd help him up the stairs because his wife, she wouldn't come down to help him up the stairs. Then Jude would get home and I'd go to bed and we'd sleep it off.

32:30 **So the dawn service was something quite special?**

Yeah. It was the dawn, being service personnel we always have to attend dawn service. It was dawn service, I'm not a rum person so I didn't have rum and milk. It's always ironic that when I was in Vietnam, I can't say it, Jude's probably listening, she was in primary school when I was in Vietnam. The culture's

33:00 taking up, the learning culture about Vietnam has taken a little while. In some cases it's been a real steep learning curve for her in some of the moods she has to put up with me being in. She's been very, very supportive of me. She's been so supportive that in some cases I tell her to pull her head in, she said she was going to go to the minister

33:30 because I'm still a serving member.

**So the army's had to come and try and stop her?**

She got a note from a colonel to say, "Pull your head in, back away from", what did he call it, "from your crusade against", what she was doing.

**What is it in your boys**

34:00 **that at a young age caught an interest in your military life?**

Jason's a military moron. He's the be all end all. He want's to be a military. Sam's a quiet achiever. Sam, I reckon, you can quote me on it, I reckon that he was going to go ADF [Australian Defence Force] and become an officer. He's just the things that he's

34:30 done. When I was RSM in Queensland University regiment, I used to attend regular parades down at Royal Military College Duntroon. I'd take Jude and the boys with me. Sam's got this - he's looking around and the ADF college [ADFA -Australian Defence Force Academy] have a look around there. Just a few things that he's let slip. Jason, because of his physical problems may or may not...

35:00 **If they joined up and were requested to go off to a theatre of war, what advice would you give them?**

All I would say to them is, "Son, you've got 100% support from your family." You need that support.

35:30 Anzac Day, when I was going down some years to Sydney to march, but I was with the boys. I was interviewed by The Sydney Morning Herald, just standing there, I wasn't wearing medals, I just wasn't, those were the funny years. I wasn't wearing medals and things like that, those were the funny years. Somehow she picked me out because I had the Returned Servicemen badge on and she said, "Come and introduce yourself" And she understood. Exactly the same question that she asked me, but during the interview I started crying, looking at Sam and

36:00 Jason thinking. I said to her, "I would be supportive of national service. If the boys were called up to national service I would support them either way, whether they wanted to or", but that's somewhere I've had to make the choosing. I think the boys will go. I think they would join rather than be called up if necessary.

**If they got shipped off into infantry?**

36:30 I hope they do. Like I said, if I was the chief of the defence force or chief of the army, I would say that everybody should do at least a minimum of 12 months, 18 months in an infantry battalion and then allocated to a corps because the primary role of a soldier today, a fighting soldier, is required to be able to lead and to be able to conduct infantry line of tactics.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**