

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Stephen Reynolds (Blue) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1406>

### Tape 1

00:32 **Can you tell us an overall summary of your life so far?**

So far? Okay, a brief summary. Grew up in Townsville and went to school in Townsville, got called up for National Service. And

01:00 joined the 2nd Battalion, it went to Vietnam as infantrymen and after Vietnam, there was so much conflict going on that I decided to leave Australia and went to England and didn't return for seven years. I then returned

01:30 to a Townsville summer, at Christmas 1980, and couldn't bear the heat, so I left again and went travelling around Australia and returned after about two and a half or three years, when I then worked in construction jobs in western Queensland mainly and it was on one of those

02:00 construction jobs where I had a mental breakdown and a subsequent application for a pension with Veterans' Affairs and that was approved about five years ago and I've been a pensioner for five years. And - that's about it.

**So you were brought up in Townsville?**

02:30 Grew up in Townsville.

**In this particular area where you live now?**

In this suburb.

**So what was Townsville like in - what year were you born?**

1948, I was born.

**So what was Townsville like in the early and mid '50s?**

Dry and dusty. And no trees, not like the city is now. And I went to the local Belgian Garden School, which I thought was awful,

03:00 very strict primary school. And my family, my parents split up when I was very young about four or five years old and my brother and I were raised by my father and I never saw my mother ever again. Although she did live in this city. And raised by my Dad, went to

03:30 Town High School and then had a - and then a subsequent apprenticeship as a motor mechanic and during those years I played sport, I played hockey, with a local hockey club, down at the park in West End here. And represented Townsville a few times, in hockey. and my main

04:00 interests during those teenage years was motorcycles, so I was a bit of a bikie when I was a kid. And that - straight after my apprenticeship I was called up. So..

**That's unusual that you were brought up with your father, because..**

In those years it was very unusual for the father to get parental rights.

04:30 I don't know. I've never inquired as to why that - I have my suspicions, but I don't know. I also have a half brother and a half sister older than me, live in Townsville that I've never met. Never worried about.

**Older than you, so they belong to your mother or your father?**

Yeah, they belong to my mother. Yeah.

**So she was**

05:00 **married prior to your father?**

Yes. And I think my mother was a – there was a well-known dance scene outfit in Townsville during the war years and my mother was in that. And after my Dad returned from the war, my Dad was a prisoner of the Japanese and he was on the imprisoned in Changi and also on the Burma, he worked on the Burma railway and he

05:30 suffered greatly and soon after the war ended when my Dad returned I think they married and as I say, it only lasted a couple of years. During my upbringing I – and for all of my Dad's life – I didn't know that he had constant nightmares and as a child I vividly

06:00 remember my Dad's horrible sleepless nights and the trauma that he went through at night, by himself, And Dad also, although the mental condition known as post traumatic stress in those years, wasn't recognised,

06:30 Dad did get a pension at about age 55, for a mental condition. And I'm sure it was a war-caused mental condition, which is exactly what has affected a lot of us and affected me.

**It's a different way of handling the**

07:00 **effects of the war for men after the Second World War..**

It was.

**Do you think that had anything to do with your parents' break up?**

No. It was something else.

**So that would have been hard growing up without a mother figure. Did you have another woman that was like a mother to you?**

We had – Dad employed housekeepers, live-in housekeepers and no

07:30 not mother figures but they were always there for meals and the house was always clean and tidy and my brother and I – well I'm not – really can't talk for my brother but I never felt deprived or never suffered as a result of not having a mother. But perhaps it was

08:00 the legacy of that later on was that I was a very shy young fellow. Until I started to travel when I was okay, I changed then.

**Sounds like your father had enough love to go around.**

Oh yes. He was a very fine man and from

08:30 very astute – he rode a pushbike to work all his life, he was a cabinet maker and when he became a pensioner he had very little money and he – once we were off his hands, he

09:00 was able to build a quite large – quite considerable asset, probably apart from his property about a six figure asset in investments. So he died at 86, so in 30 years he built a very large asset, from these pension.

09:30 **What did he build? An apartment?**

No, he had investments.

**Oh okay, so he was thrifty?**

Well we never, ever went short and he was thrifty but he drank, my Dad drank every weekend, every Friday afternoon after work he'd go up to the pub and come home half full and Saturday afternoon he always had a few beers and get half tipsy again. That all stopped when he was about 55, I

10:00 can remember that happened or – when we were growing up every weekend, or every Friday and Saturday Dad had a few beers, that all stopped at about 55 when he – later – before he passed away a few years ago, he said, "Oh I stopped drinking at 55, it's too expensive." But he was very astute and watched the share market and watched investment funds and did very well.

**And did that all kind of happen from retiring? After retiring age?**

Yes.

10:30 From his pension. And when, for a number of years before my Dad passed away he was not receiving the pension, because he had too much money, so all he received was the disability component, the TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension] component. So, yeah.

11:00 That was my Dad, he was – he suffered a lot as a result of the Second World War and he suffered a lot and I've no doubt – I know that the – our grandfathers, or that generation suffered even worse in the First World War, in Europe in the trenches. So really what my

11:30 generation and – what we suffered in Vietnam was nothing like the other generations suffered.

**Do you think you've inherited any of your father's business acumen?**

I hope so, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure. We'll see if I last another 30 years. I don't know.

12:00 **What about your older brother?**

Younger brother.

**Younger brother. Did he also end up going to Vietnam?**

No, he wasn't called up. No.

**Are you close to him?**

We're not close but neither do we distance ourselves. We spend Christmas together and

12:30 yeah.

**Is he up here?**

My brother's in Townsville, yeah.

**What about your grandparents, did you know any of your grandparents?**

No. No. No I did not. But I know of them, one was a saddler, in the

13:00 goldmining district of Ravenswood, and also up on the tablelands, and they were the first – one was on the first ship that was into Townsville with free settlers. One was on that. So long link with Townsville. My family.

**And you said, after the war you came**

13:30 **back and it was too hot so you..**

Well after the war, the Vietnam War, I – there was a lot of turmoil, a lot of conflict in Australia. And my thoughts on the war were – I was very unsure about why we were there and when we returned,

14:00 we were just put back into the Australian society and there was conflict. Still conflict and I then left and went to England. So it was a result of seven years living in a – in northern Europe that I then felt when I returned to Townsville in the middle of

14:30 a tropical summer, it was just so hot for me.

**You said that you were into motorbikes when you were a kid, when did that fascination start occurring?**

Well because we lived so close to the Townsville common, which is an area they used to graze cattle, at about

15:00 14 years old, and at that age, we – there were – many old English motorcycles lying around and us kids would be able to get hold of them for 10 or 20 dollars and we used to ride them down to the local town common at about 14 or 15. And we were all interested in the mechanics of them and I – as I said, I was a

15:30 an apprentice mechanic in this area of Townsville, this suburb are, this Belgian Gardens, there were half a dozen of us that were doing that. Motorcycles. And my interest in motorcycles has stayed with me all my life so I'm a full member now of the Ulysses Squad, so you become a full member at 50. Which is – the Ulysses is the old farts motorcycle club.

16:00 **The idea of riding your bikes near the common and what have you, I take it these weren't dirt bikes, these were just..**

Oh, just old English road bikes, yeah.

**So you must have knocked them down to the ground if you were..?**

Oh yeah. Come back with cuts and burns on the

16:30 legs from the mufflers and things like that. Yeah.

**So were you one of those boys that were more interested in mechanics than girls?**

Probably. Yeah.

**But I take it you did get interested in girls, but when did that..?**

Oh it was after Vietnam when I went to Europe, I was a tour driver. So I used to drive camping tours out of London, south to Morocco and east to Istanbul

17:00 and north to the Arctic Circle. And all of the Iron Curtain countries, before the – before it all fell apart. Used to do farmhouse tours in Ireland as well, so went west as well. North, South, east and west. So I did that for seven European summers and in the

17:30 European winters I'd travel a bit, I'd come home – came home twice for a few weeks and I went to Canada one winter and went skiing a few winters in Europe, Austria.

**Jeez you've been around, haven't you?**

I was lucky. Lucky to do that.

**Was part of that**

18:00 **doing seven European summers in a row, part of your own therapy for Vietnam, do you think?**

Well, when I arrived in England, late 1973. It was – the miners were on strike, and the power was very short in England so they were only working three day week,

18:30 through a shortage of power. And there was a lot of industrial unrest. I think Arthur Scargill was the miners' leader and the miners were up in arms. But I thought, well this is not my country, I'm over here living in England, it's not my country, I don't care.

19:00 So I didn't have to think about what was happening. So I was just there enjoying myself. And eventually, apart from the fact that I missed my father, I would not have returned to Australia but that I was

19:30 being hassled at the entry point at Dover, they were suggesting that I was about time I went home. And sooner or later I knew that I was going to be refused entry to England. So that's when I decided I would head home and see what happens.

20:00 The – I remember being in a bar in Amsterdam, when the tanks went through the gates of the palace in Saigon, in 1975. And watching the fall of Saigon.

20:30 And another memory also is that one of the girls on one of my trips was a convent educated girl and none of the passengers ever knew my background but this particular girl said, at the fall- when this happened in 1975- she said, "We

21:00 were lucky there were no Australians in this war." And I said to the girl, well she was a young woman, I said to her, "Why do you think that there were no Australians there?" And this young woman said, "Well, that's what we were taught in our convent and our school." And she was a – and I said, "That's not true." She said, "Well that's what

21:30 I know, that's what I was taught." I couldn't believe it, what I was hearing. This young woman was saying to me.

**Did you tell her?**

I don't know. I don't think I would have. No, But, yeah, I remember that, I don't know if that young woman was just naive or what. Yeah.

**Well I know**

22:00 **having lived in America for six years, that Americans, some Americans don't even know that Australia was there.**

I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised. I don't – it's not too long ago they wouldn't have known where Australia was.

**So when you were growing up, were you aware of the problems your father may have faced with the Depression?**

No.

22:30 Not aware of it, at all. No.

**And did he talk to you about his experiences?**

No, no, only very late in life, did he talk. No, he didn't try to prepare me for Vietnam, he I think,

23:00 the only thing I can remember my Dad saying to me is that, before I was called up, was – before I went into the army was that I would meet many different type blokes all sorts of type blokes, I think he was trying to prepare me for you know, I – how could I explain? Just to be

23:30 a bit careful that's all I guess he was trying to say. Yeah. But I was well prepared, I mean I knew what I was doing, yeah, at 20 year old I could mix it with all the blokes. Yeah.

**Why was that do you think? Because was it because you were used to your (UNCLEAR)?**

Well probably a protected

24:00 background I mean, never travelled, never been anywhere, small town, naive, not knowing what was going on really. He was probably saying, it's a big world out there and you be careful or someone's going to stamp on you. You know? But the thing was that we were preparing for a war, so it was much worse than that. I think that's - but

24:30 he had been through the horrors of it. He would never - he'd never spoke about what he had experienced. Not when I was a kid anyway, not as a 20 year old.

**And did you - you obviously must have got some kind of pocket money or did some kind of casual work to be able to afford these parts for your bike?**

Oh we were never short of money.

25:00 I mean Dad worked all his life and we were never short of money, we never had anything excess though, never had any extra money. Oh yeah, we always had - and as soon as I became, began working, you know it was - never short of money.

**Did you ever think about returning to that apprenticeship trade?**

As a mechanic?

**Yes.**

Well

25:30 yeah, I did. After Vietnam I worked in London for -as a mechanic initially and I was working for Hertz Truck Rental in London and then worked for the - started to work for an Australian company maintaining these, the fleet of coaches that went to Europe and all of the drivers and couriers or tour leaders,

26:00 were my age. All Australians and I soon became involved in what they were doing and I was then asked to become a driver, get my license and become a driver. But when I returned from Europe I did go back to that and when I was working out west, on the mines in construction, well I was a fitter, diesel fitter. Looking after equipment.

26:30 **After you got stopped there at Dover and you came back to Australia, after being away for seven years, what happened then?**

When I returned? I returned to Townsville and stayed with my Dad for Christmas and by

27:00 there was a folk festival on in Alice Springs so I -at Easter so I headed off about the end of January and went down as far as Melbourne and Adelaide and then found myself at Alice Springs at Easter and then I became a driver for Greyhound, working out of Alice Springs,

27:30 from Alice Springs to Dunmarra which is half way up to Darwin. And I then met a English woman who was recuperating from a badly fractured arm, her brother was a doctor in Adelaide and she was out here for a couple of years and we stayed together then for a couple of years after six months

28:00 or so in Alice Springs, we travelled to Sydney where I did a two year adult matriculation course at Randwick Tech [Technical College]and after that returned home to Townsville and my friend went back to England.

**What was the matriculation course same as high school?**

28:30 Yeah it was whatever - year 12 or something. HSC [Higher School Certificate], That's it. So I did that.

**Good for you.**

Hard.

**I know I did it and I failed.**

It was five nights a week for two years. That's why she went home I think. Yeah.

29:00 **After that you decided to return to Queensland?**

Yeah, returned home to Townsville, and that was about the mid 1980s. And I then started to work in construction and mine sites. Working as a fitter, looking after

29:30 machinery.

**When you say, 'mine sites,' like Mt Isa?**

Well initially it was construction, I did about five years at the Burdekin Dam in the construction of the Burdekin Dam and then the construction of the newer mines out in western Queensland like the Placerone Mine Osborne and Cannington Mine, the BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary]

30:00 mine and Phosphate Hill. So I worked in the construction of those mines, for a number of years.

**Actually making them, not going down into them?**

No, making them.

**What happened with this English woman, that was just off, she went back to England, that was the end of it?**

That was - oh that was about the end of it. I went

30:30 I went back in 1984, I think to England for a holiday and that was it I think.

**What happened then? The mining situation - you stayed there until those mines were made, and then did you come back down to Townsville?**

Well, it was a fly in, fly out

31:00 job. So I was living in Townsville and after five years or so of working out in those western mines, that's when I had the - had a mental breakdown. So I was

31:30 returned to Townsville, and never went back. And soon after that, I probably nine months or so, I received a pension.

**Is it true that you have children?**

Oh yes. Yes.

**When did they come into it?**

When did all this happen? I

32:00 used to - another mate of mine from my days wandering around Europe, used to ring me up from Sydney and say to me, would I like to go over to the Philippines, for a holiday? And at the time I had a cabin cruiser and used to go out the reef fishing

32:30 and I'd always say to my mate, No I'd rather be out the reef fishing." And then he kept ringing up, year after year and I would - I eventually said, 'I'll go over for a couple of weeks." And we went over and stayed at a beach resort and then went over again the next year and the year after and that's where I met

33:00 Venice, over there, at a resort. And we married and then two kids came along and the marriage lasted about ten years. Or nine years I think and the marriage failed. And I think the marriage failed as a result of my mental problems.

33:30 But we are now on very good terms.

**I thought Venice was your wife.**

Well ex-wife. Ex, yeah.

**So you have two children together?**

Two children, yeah. That's right. Two girls. Katherine and Erica.

**That's lovely that you're still friends.**

Oh yeah.

34:00 **What about Singapore, though, did you like it?**

Where?

**Philippines?**

Did I like it? Did I like it? Oh well, it's a country that Ven comes from. It's - did I like it? It's hard to say. It's a - Manila is a big

34:30 Asian city. It's not the place I would really want to spend a lot of time in. But it was a lovely country to see. People are very friendly and happy, even though most of them are very poor. Yeah. Oh we'd - I think we will be going back again this year, Venice and the two girls and myself to see her Dad

35:00 who is getting on. So yeah.

**You didn't mention if you had any pets or..?**

Always had dogs.

**Always had dogs.**

Yeah, I always had a dog, yeah. And - Bimbo. Bimbo.

35:30 **Poor thing.**

Poor thing? He was a well loved dog. But he embarrassed me so much at the, one of the school - we - they still have it, the school has a fancy dress ball and we used to get out in the centre of this arena and at the fancy dress ball, all dressed

36:00 up and old Bimbo followed me in once and Bimbo wasn't supposed to be there. Very embarrassing for a kid.

36:30 **And what about friends, since you're back in this area, have you had good friends the whole time that you've stayed in contact with?**

Oh yeah. Yeah I have. Lots of friends. Quite a few

37:00 close friends. And lots and lots of acquaintances my generation, because Townsville was so relatively small when I was 20, many of us used to go down to a local hotel in Flinders Street East, for the - what was the Goose Club, Picnic - Magnetic Island, Picnic Bay

37:30 Goose Club. It was a raffle, a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK raffle. So 12 o'clock on Saturdays we'd all be down there and there would be 30 or 40 of us, all - most of us were young apprentices or electricians, mechanics, plumbers and that generation of blokes, many of us went to Vietnam. And yeah, I keep in touch with

38:00 quite a few. Most of them now are TPI pensioners.

**When you said, a lot of you went to Vietnam together, was that because the government had - okay well, all men born from January to March 1948 or something like that, have to sign up. Is that how it worked?**

Not exactly, I think it was

38:30 certain birth dates. And those on that birth date went. Yeah. And I think if you didn't go, I mean if you were called up and refused to go, there was a way out, I think, you would be a conscientious objector. But I think the penalty was jail. If you didn't go.

39:00 Or if you did go in and then decided this wasn't for you, once again it was jail was the alternative. Yeah, something like that.

**So a lot of those men that were - you hang out with at the Goose Club, obviously were the same age?**

Oh yeah, all twentyish. Yeah, that's right.

**And their birthdays just happened to fall in the lottery balls.**

That's right.

39:30 That's it. Yeah.

## Tape 2

00:31 **Townsville in the 1950s, was it a military town then?**

No it wasn't. It wasn't. It was only in the - well I think from the middle 1960s on, when Australia began

01:00 building the army up to nine battalions which it had at its peak, was then Lavarack Barracks established in the middle to late 1960s. That's when the Townsville - I guess you could've started to call it a military town. And

01:30 when I - after I was called up and did my recruit and corps training in Singleton, I was then returned to Townsville, to the 2nd Battalion, for the - my second six months in the army and that six months was training, full on training for the 2nd Battalion's second trip to Vietnam. And

02:00 previous to this in Townsville, there had been a couple of battalions already gone through the city, to Vietnam and the term in Townsville, AJs was already established. AJs; army jerks, that's what we were called, AJs in Townsville. So yeah, in answer to your question it was, I guess for a few years before I

02:30 came back to Townsville in 1970, it was a garrison town.

**So there must have been quite a few changes? (UNCLEAR)**

Yeah I think so. Yes.

**So what was the Townsville like that you knew in the early to mid '60s?**

Well,

03:00 I guess starting from the centre of the town, Flinders Street was – wasn't a mall it was just a – two roads up and down Flinders Street with palm trees in the middle but mostly what I can remember is a hot and dusty town. That's all I can remember. Hot and dusty.

03:30 But the city has changed quite dramatically over 20 odd years or so I think. I could say. The city is a very green city now. Nothing like that when I grew up, no. But I think it was only 45,000 people here. When I was about 20.

**And you mentioned a passion for motorbikes, do you remember**

04:00 **what your first motorbike was?**

I think it probably would have been an old Triumph, yeah, an old Triumph would have been my first one. And I had a Triumph Bonneville just before I went to go overseas to Vietnam and sold it. Just before.

04:30 **What was it about motorbikes that took your fancy?**

I don't know. I don't know. It was just – was motorbikes, but probably cars as well, said, most of the other blokes were interested in cars in those days and, yeah, just you know, don't know, just an interest.

**Were you more a collector of them**

05:00 **or would you as an apprentice mechanic, grab one and do it up, flog it and grab another one?**

No, no, I didn't do that. I did in later years, bring a couple back from England. A couple of collector bikes, but no, in those years no, just used to sort of a hobby really.

05:30 **You mentioned that your dad didn't speak about any thing, any of his experiences of World War 11 or as a POW.**

Not in my earlier years. No.

**What was your understanding I guess as a young lad, of the nightmares and things that he would have at night?**

06:00 **And I guess the sort of mental illness that he was coping with?**

Well I didn't understand. I didn't realise what my Dad was going through. I – my brother and I just learned to live with it. That was it. The trauma that Dad went through

06:30 I don't believe I did associate that with what he'd been through in the war, until later years, when it all added up, that he was badly affected by his experiences at the hands of the Japanese. On that railway.

07:00 **It was a bad time for a lot of fellas.**

Well, absolutely. Absolutely, those ones that were captured at the fall of Singapore, went through a lot.

07:30 **What did you and your brother – how did you function as a family unit as a single dad looking after his two boys. Would you help out around the house at all..?**

No, I don't think my Dad – no, no, no.

08:00 I think those years there probably was not much need for discipline we were a couple of fairly well behaved young boys. Dad never used to have to resort to discipline at all. And

08:30 we were quite a – we were a happy family. You know, I don't – I guess we didn't ever go on holidays, because there was probably not enough money, but I never, ever felt deprived and I don't think we were. I mean, nothing was ever short and we always had everything we needed for school and yeah,

09:00 so I guess, we were not an exceptional family in the fact that money was tight. I think there were many, many families like us. After the war years. Perhaps maybe a slight exception that there was no mum around, but that didn't worry us, my brother or myself. And no, I think a normal family. Quite happy.

09:30 **So I guess, it sounds like the repercussions of what your dad had gone through in his war experience was just something that you might have observed glimpses of from time to time.**

Well, yes. I guess I could remember maybe once or twice or

10:00 no more, once or twice, Dad may have come home with his mate a bit late on a Friday evening, and after had a few too many beers and I think once or twice he did – they may have been talking about the war experiences amongst themselves, my Dad and his mate Tom and it may have – he may have included my brother and myself very briefly,

10:30 in talking about it. I think that happened., but I cannot remember the details. But that was probably only because my Dad had had a few beers but he would never talk – discuss it, never. When, apart from a situation like that, Until much later, when my Dad and I in the

11:00 few years before my Dad passed away, we would sit down and he would talk to me about some of the things that he'd seen and done and some of the funny experiences that he had.

**And do you think that was part of him getting older or the fact that you'd been involved in war as well?**

I think

11:30 my Dad wanted to keep, he wanted to – for me to know that's all. Some of the things that he'd done and been through, And he wrote a little journal and set down all of his

12:00 experiences during the war, He did, yeah, Some of the things that, yeah.

**We've run into quite a lot of fellas who talk of doing that, but they haven't quite got there yet.**

He spent about ten or fifteen years doing it. First of all, he got it all on tape, over many years and

12:30 and then eventually got it made up into a journal. He was a tough old fellow and he – my Dad was very small and perhaps not as strong physically as many of the other men, that were captured, but mentally he was very

13:00 tough and he physically was maybe not as strong but he told me that – and this is what I already knew – was that in a war like situation, injured and dying persons are – men are left so that the

13:30 doctors and the medical teams can save ones that they think they will be able to save. Whereas the others they can't they let them go. And this is what happened to my – well three of them and they were all put out one evening to I can't say it was a hospital he'd never say it was – it wasn't a hospital and it wasn't camp, on the railway but where they were some medical team, they put the

14:00 three of them out on the ground on mats expecting in the morning that they would be burnt, throw them on the fire, but of the three my Dad was, the other two were dead and my Dad survived and kept on going, Kept on going for another 40 years.

14:30 And one instance of the – of humour, there was a Lord Mountbatten who was killed in – killed by a bomb in Ireland, in the late 1970s, well Louis Mount- I think it was Louis Mountbatten, well he visited the

15:00 they were all in a prison camp at the end of the war and he came through the barracks and the – the fellow who was sleeping next to my Dad in this barracks was the barber and as Mountbatten came through with his minders, he had a few brief words to the barber. And

15:30 wandered out and Dad said, as quick as a flash, the barber had a sign up near his bed and the sign said, 'under royal patronage.' Under Royal Patronage, yeah.

**You mentioned that you**

16:00 **felt that your dad's experiences in the war had an effect on you as a kid, what did you feel that was?**

Well only the – the only effect that – well the effect that he had was that his fitful

16:30 nights that he had, that's been with me all my life, having his screams and his then nightmares that he had at night. I was always conscious of my Dad's

17:00 trauma that he had at night. His nightmares and things, that's – I don't know if it, it didn't affect us, it was just something that we were – we went through you know, growing up. But I don't know if I guess, many of the children of those veterans, those Second World War blokes, would have endured

17:30 that. Would have been through the same thing, being ill.

**Exactly it's an irregular occurrence for it not to happen.**

It's not that I don't talk about that I mean,

18:00 I don't - that's not something you talk about, or wish to talk about really.

**At the time you mean?**

Well to anyone, you – I would never talk about that. I would never talk about that to – well there's no need to and my experiences in Vietnam don't – I don't talk about that. There's no need to talk about that. In

18:30 fact, even with - amongst the blokes whenever we get together, nothing much is spoken about in detail, might be a few funny things – to talk about but..

**What did you observe of your dad's attitude or reaction to the Japanese after the war?**

19:00 Well my Dad had an intense dislike and distrust of the Japanese and up until this remained with him until he passed away and I cannot remember the detail but it wasn't too long before my Dad passed away that

19:30 he commented on something that was happening and he said, "Never trust them, never trust them." So he - never did. Never did, no.

**You mentioned that you and your brother and your dad had a good time, you were a happy family, can you give us**

20:00 **a story from happier times, things that you'd do together?**

I don't think I could give a specific story, no. But no, we - no I can't. But there, you know, there was

20:30 no - I can't think of any unhappy time, I mean I was always confident and never had a worry in the world. Lack of a mother, if you grow up without a mother it doesn't matter, you don't miss anyone.

**You don't miss what you don't have.**

Yeah, that's correct.

21:00 **You were obviously well cared for and well loved.**

Oh absolutely. Oh yes.

**What did you know as a teenager,**

21:30 **coming up to 20 about communism?**

Very little. Very little. And the thinking at the time I guess, was I think Menzies had a lot to do with what they call, 'the domino effect.' Which was the thinking at the time and of course if

22:00 Vietnam fell to the communists then other countries were going to fall and we were at the bottom and it was going to be Australia as well. So that was the thinking and that's what was drummed into us, was going to happen.

**Was that before you were called up?**

No. That was

22:30 a reason given for us to be in the army. But before that, before I was called up, no I never thought about politics at all. The visit to Townsville of Johnson, the American president, in the middle to late 1960s I can't remember

23:00 when. I don't believe I even went to see him I think lots of other Townsville people did, but I didn't, wasn't interested. I think the Prime Minister was Mr Holt, Harold Holt and I think it was, "All the way with LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson]" at the time.

23:30 So really I didn't have any, wasn't interested politically. Although I did have - I was aware of the conflict that was starting in Australia about -

**In what way?**

Well the anti-war sentiment that was building. And the

24:00 problems that the army was starting to have with anti-war protestors. I was starting to hear about that.

**What sort of things were happening?**

Well I -

24:30 Yes, I can't recall specifically any incidences but I think even before we went in 1970, there were cases of I don't know, paint being thrown and things like this and

25:00 the supply ship that was going to Vietnam at the time, I think the Melbourne wharfies, painters and dockers were even at that time, threatening to try to stop it. These things were occurring.

**I know you've mentioned that you weren't politically motivated, in any way, but did you have**

25:30 **an opinion at all, as to Vietnam itself?**

I was - although I accepted that this - the national service part of it - I did have doubts about why

26:00 why it was occurring. I did have doubts about it. Not - I can't say it was politics, it was just that I was not sure that we should be fighting a war in another country. And being politically naive and

- 26:30 young, in those years, I don't think many younger people were much interested in politics – I think it's a lot different now, but I was very unsure about why we should be up there in Vietnam. And now, when I look back I think, you know, it's a – to me I think it was a civil war.
- 27:00 I don't think we should have been there at all.
- What about other elements of the 1960s, in terms of fashion and music, what was going on in Townsville?**
- Not much at all. Townsville was such a small town. Nothing. It was an outpost. No I can't remember.
- 27:30 Nothing much to remember.
- You don't recall the kind of music you were listening to before you got called up?**
- If I did think about it I probably would. I think the musical, Hair, was on, in Sydney, No. I remember – I do remember the music from Vietnam, the Vietnam era.
- 28:00 A lot of Creedence Clearwater Revival and a lot of black soul music. Yeah. But no I can't remember the fashions I guess. The fashions would have been flared pants, I guess – oh I don't know if they were flared then or could be later on in the '70s. Don't remember.
- (UNCLEAR)**
- 28:30 The outpost, yeah.
- Would have been interesting reaction if they had. Were you aware of the Korean War at all, before you went to Vietnam?**
- Only aware of it. I was aware of it. Didn't know anything about it, just that it had occurred. Yeah. Really the
- 29:00 Second World War, First World War and Korea didn't know anything about it, no. No.
- What did you know of conscription before it happened to you? Was it happening to fellas around you at all?**
- Yes. Yes.
- 29:30 Strangely enough though, of the circle of friends, mates, that I had, perhaps we'd be down at the Goose Club on Saturday and one or two mightn't be there any more and then
- 30:00 we- it might be said that they were called up and people had returned and once again no one ever spoke about it, no one – you're away for two years and came back and that was the end of it. No one spoke about what they'd been through. Very strange,
- Did you notice a change in**
- 30:30 **the fellas that had gone away and come back?**
- Oh yes. Yes, you'd notice that alright. Yeah. Couldn't get a – well, as I said, you wouldn't speak about it, but I can't describe, I'd have to think about it. They weren't
- 31:00 these fellows I don't think were what they were when they left. They were different. I can't describe the changes though. No.
- Can you describe what happened for you in terms of your conscription?**
- What do you mean, in what way?
- Well, how did it happen,**
- 31:30 **how did you get word?**
- Oh okay. I think notified by post, at the time and then ordered to have a medical and – in Townsville here – and once the medical was passed, we were then given
- 32:00 orders to report to Enoggera in Brisbane. And this was the way we went to Brisbane was by a train which was just for national servicemen and it started in Cairns and picked them up all the way down to Brisbane. And –
- How much notice did you get?**
- We got
- 32:30 quite a bit of notice. Some of us were not able to go at the time, we had to complete apprenticeships and once we had that – so we had, I think six months. I think I had about six months before I went in because of – I had to complete the apprenticeship. And as soon as that was completed

33:00 soon after, there was four intakes a year, so it was the next intake that I went into. And mine was the 16th intake and that was March/April, 1969.

**What about the medical to get you in, in the first place, how comprehensive was that? What did they do as part of that medical?**

33:30 I can't remember the medical. No. No I can't.

**Can remember some of the World War 11 boys, saying, "Oh well, if you had two arms and two legs, you'd get passed."**

Yeah, I've no doubt in World War 11 that would have happened. It was- I think it was fairly comprehensive medical.

34:00 And of course, then another medical in Brisbane when we got there. And even then some blokes were - got - even went into recruit training. And halfway through recruit training were turfed out or were not good enough, medically unfit.

34:30 **And the train journey, from Cairns all the way down to Brisbane, so you were meeting a lot of fellas who had been called up as well. Did you make any friends or talk about what you were expecting?**

We - I went with

35:00 one or two fellows that I knew. That were also called up. In fact two fellows that were in my class at school. So, wasn't completely alone on that train and - oh yes, we met up with many - met up with many fellows and I think we were all a bit apprehensive and

35:30 it was I suppose, what you'd call a 'troop train.' And we were ordered not to have any alcohol on board, some blokes got off at Rocky and run across the pub and bought some booze and brought back -

**As you do.**

Yeah, as you do, that's right.

36:00 **What were you allowed to bring with you? Or was there a strict requirement on what you had to bring or not bring?**

I can't remember. I can't remember. I think we - I think all we would have had was a couple of pairs of civvy clothes, that's all. Because everything was supplied. Yeah. And the recruit

36:30 training was 12 weeks so the first six weeks we were not allowed to leave anyway and so we were posted from Enoggera to, those of us who went to the infantry, went to Singleton. And in the middle of winter and it was first six weeks, so we were in greens anyway for six weeks. We didn't need anything.

37:00 **So you didn't really get to see much or anything of Brisbane?**

No, nothing. Nothing.

**Bit of a shame, first time.**

Yeah. Well that's right. Nothing.

**So what happened - the train pulls into Brisbane**

37:30 **and what happens? The military meet you there and..?**

Yes, And over to Enoggera, another medical, another medical and then we were all, I can't remember how we all got to Singleton. But we all went to Singleton. For the first 12 weeks.

38:00 **So Enoggera was really just a pit stop as well.**

It was. Yeah, that's right.

**Why are you smiling?**

I'm just thinking back and.. some of the bits I might have left out, don't want to talk about.

**I have to remind you of the War Archive. Our license is very broad.**

## Tape 3

00:32 **This suburb where you live is it Belgian, or Belgium?**

Belgian, B-E-L-G-I-A-N. It used to be German Gardens, and that - during the time of the First World War,

the name was changed.

**For obvious reasons. You were called up in 1969?**

That's correct.

**So that was**

01:00 **a really meaty time in the student demonstrations, particularly in Sydney. Did you - were you aware of all that was happening down south?**

Vaguely. Only vaguely aware of it.

**Did you care?**

Yes. Yeah, I cared. I was

01:30 it was helping me try to work out what was happening. But once we were in the army, it was fairly hard to remain aloof from it, I mean, how do I explain that? It was fairly hard to

02:00 also stay neutral. Try to work it out for yourself, because we were, we were being trained for war in Vietnam and the reasons given for the war, the communists and things, so really most of us were anti, what the objectives were. Most of

02:30 us I'm saying. I was trying to -as I said - work it out for myself and I really wasn't, don't think I was ever pro what we were doing, more than likely a bit anti what was happening. So yeah. So it was -

03:00 The objectives probably were older than us at 20 year old I should think and fairly political. Whereas us blokes, most of us were you know, working class fellows that were not political at that age.

**Do you think therein lay the conflict, that later on in life this conflict of caring about it but also**

03:30 **being aware of doing your duty I suppose, was a form of a conflict that helped your breakdown?**

Yes. Oh, no. No I don't think so. No. No I think the mental problems that I have had I think are a result of

04:00 of seeing extreme violence at such an early age and not the result of any political views that I may have subsequently have had.

**We may have to talk about that violence later on in the day. So I'll just leave it for a sec. But I can imagine that would have a huge effect on somebody.**

04:30 **Particularly the men were so young and - like a piece of clay not moulded.**

That's right. I think so. I think - I do believe 20 year olds today, are much more well equipped and they have a much broader outlook on life than we did. I think we were fairly

05:00 narrow and fairly conservative in those years. I think so anyway,

**You said before that a whole bunch of you from Townsville went down to Brisbane, were there any of those people your mates that were draft dodgers?**

Draft dodgers. None on that train, no. But I did work with one. And

05:30 he was called up before me probably 18 months to two years before me. He was one of the first ones to be called up I should think. And he decided it wasn't for him and tried to disappear and he was captured and did I don't know how long, six months

06:00 I think in prison. I can't remember if it was a military prison or a civvy prison and eventually turfed out but he was a fella that I worked with,

**You hear in American films about the draft dodgers racking off to Canada or Mexico and then returning five years later, so I suppose it'd be a bit difficult with Australia because we're so far away from..**

That's right. That's right. They went to Sweden

06:30 too didn't they?

**Did they really?**

Mmm. And surprisingly there was a number of them on the Island of Ibiza, off the coast of Barcelona, Spain. American draft dodgers.

**Gee that would be alright. The coast of Spain, drinking sangria and dancing girls.**

That's right.

### **Now the government**

07:00 **had a way of using birthdays as a way to draft men into the army. Did it come in the letter, when they said, "Alright you have to turn up here," any form of punishment that would occur to you if you didn't?**

Not that I'm aware of, I think it was - I think this is what - this was the law and this is what you would do.

07:30 I can't think that any punishment was recorded then. No, if you didn't do it. No.

### **What was it that made you say, "Yes okay, I'm not going to rack off to Darwin?"**

Oh okay. Well I probably wasn't

08:00 the type that would do anything like that. I think I'd made up my mind, once I was called up that this was what I had to do. I was probably going to look at it on as a bit of an adventure. Although I know and I always had reservations about what we were doing. But once in the army

08:30 and once established in the army, these reservations were really not anything you would make public. You would not talk about it too much because once you started to speak about these things the word, 'malingerer,' came into the conversation and a malingerer in the army is the worst person that could be around.

09:00 So I'm trying to say that if you had doubts about what you were doing, you really had to keep them to yourself. If you had doubts about the politics of it, if you were starting to think that maybe what we were doing was wrong, I guess these things had to be kept quiet.

09:30 **Is that what a malingerer is?**

Not really, a malingerer is a person that - well malingerer is army slang is a jackman, well it's - he's a selfish sort of person he's a jackman is a person who would say, "Fuck you Jack, I'm alright." That's

10:00 a jackman was a malingerer. A person who would lean on someone else or wouldn't do his fair share or wouldn't look after his mate or is looking after himself mainly and couldn't care about anyone else.

10:30 **So you felt you were doing your duty and that would have made life a little bit better for you in a way do you think with all the training and everything?**

Oh yeah. Oh we were - I enjoyed the training, learning all of the new

11:00 skills and getting physically fit, I enjoyed that. The mateship.

### **Tell us about the training?**

Oh well, the training was quite intense, physically, and mentally they were honing us. Unfortunately though,

11:30 I don't think Singleton was the right place to train us to fight a war in a tropical country. Because Singleton in the middle of winter is freezing, absolutely freezing. So the training was intense and I guess that was to change us into

12:00 being a fighting unit. The army unit trained to do what you're told to do. And if you would not, if you don't do what you're told to do or were ordered to do, without question, well then the - you can't fight as an effective force and the army just wouldn't work. So the main thing was to train us blokes to get the

12:30 necessary skills and to do what we were required without question.

### **Was there anything in particular that you were better at?**

Better at?

### **Well for instance, were you better at weaponry, rather than drill marches or..?**

Oh well, we had - well I can remember we used to have a range competition, that was firing a weapon, competition

13:00 to see who was probably the better shot. And I was good at that, But I had never fired a weapon like that before, a large calibre weapon. I was quite good at that, yeah.

### **What was the weapon?**

SLR [Self Loading Rifle]. Which was a normal weapon that the Australian Army had, the common weapon for the infanteer. 7.62

- 13:30 calibre which is an 8.0 [?]round, As opposed to the light American weapon that NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] and officers had and forward scouts which was the Armalite.
- Actually I've heard that some of the Americans would switch with the Australians, their guns.**
- 14:00 Yes, that occurred, but not in the main units of course. I think our special forces, our SAS [Special Air Service], used weapons that were not freely available, and they would have been, they would have come from the Americans. Yeah. And I think the training team also, the Australian Army Training Team were allowed to carry
- 14:30 other weapons that were not normally issued and they would have come from the Americans as well.
- You mentioned before the - hang on. Go back a little bit. The training that you did, there in Singleton,**
- 15:00 **so Brisbane you were only there for the medical and then you moved to Singleton, is that correct? So who trained you in Singleton, were they returned Vietnam veterans?**
- Mostly were veterans. Mostly were. The - we were put into platoons, quite large platoons and the officer in charge was a young officer from - just out of Scheyville which was the
- 15:30 an officer's training school set up for the Vietnam War. So these officers were mostly nashos [National Service soldiers] as well. And only in for a short time. And our officer was a young fellow from there obviously with no experience, the platoon sergeant was returned serviceman from Vietnam and the NCOs, the
- 16:00 majority of those were returned Vietnam blokes. With experience.
- It seems a little bit backwards that they made up a school to train officers Scheyville, you said, for Vietnam but these men were supposed to be in charge of other men but had never been there.**
- Yes.
- So were they liked?**
- Others may have been, ours wasn't.
- 16:30 **What was his personality like?**
- Oh, he was awful. He was pretentious, he was - he just was not the right person to be in charge of a young fellows of his age without having Vietnam experience. If, maybe he would have been a different type of person if he'd been overseas but he hadn't been
- 17:00 and he was rather an obnoxious fellow. Intensely disliked.
- I feel like you're being quite polite about him. Did he come to fisticuffs with any of the blokes?**
- He didn't, but he should have. He should have been - well he was the sort of person who liked something that used to occur, called 'leaps.' And
- 17:30 what they would do at any time of the night, would call a parade outside the barracks with certain dress. You would have to put certain dress on and you had to be out on parade within a matter of minutes. So first of all they'd march into the barracks, wake everyone up, outside, put a certain dress on and on parade.
- 18:00 At 11 o'clock or two o'clock in the morning, freezing cold. I remember we had to go out one night in black belt and bayonet. Black belt obviously a black belt, we used to wear and bayonet and that was it. That's what we had to put on and put the bayonet in the front here. And black belt on and stand to attention out as a platoon. Bloody mongrel. This was
- 18:30 I don't know, this was all character building crap. This was the sort of indignities that we had to suffer. And this fellow loved it. He loved doing these sort of things. Yes, it's a wonder he wasn't knocked down.
- Did he end up going to Vietnam?**
- I doubt it. I never heard of him going over there. No. No.
- And in your experience**
- 19:00 **in the infantry do you think any of these leaps, helped you with your war service?**
- No, of course not. No. No it was - I don't believe that these things would occur now, but they did in those days and I guess the army
- 19:30 hierarchy turned a blind eye. I've no doubt they knew everything was going on. This was to just to get you to do things without arguing, without comment, without - you just do what you're told and that was

it. So it was to get this – instil this into you.

**I suppose it's what they call, 'bastardry' today.**

Well that's right. Absolutely.

**Makes me think of that**

20:00 **Sean Connery movie, 'The Hill,' or something.**

Yeah, I didn't – I don't remember. Did something like that happen?

**Yeah, he's forced to keep walking up and down this hill. It was the same sort of, there's no reason for it, but just..**

No. No.

**Did you have a particular interest in the army during the training that you thought you might be interested in going into?**

20:30 **i.e.: work on a machine gun or maybe you're a good scout. Was there something that..?**

No. No. In corps training, we were trained on all weapons, no nothing in particular, I think we were all basically riflemen. And from there the

21:00 stronger ones I guess, became gunners because the gun was rather heavy and some were picked for other work. But I didn't have any at the time. Not at corps training, no.

**Are you a grunt? Is that what they called the infantry/**

Yeah, American term, grunt. Grunt, yeah.

21:30 **That's polite isn't it?**

Yeah.

**And an army jerk, you were an AJ**

AJ as well, yeah. The grunt. Yeah.

**Was there any rivalry between the men that were called up and the men that volunteered for Vietnam?**

No. None at all. None at all. When I was posted after corps training

22:00 to Townsville, to the 2nd Battalion there was rivalry there between the companies of the battalion so we used to drink at certain pubs and other companies would drink at other pubs and if at the end of the night if certain blokes wanted to have a bit of a blue they'd just front up at someone else's pub and there'd be a blue.

**But what was the rivalry about?**

Oh, I don't know.

22:30 I don't know. But there was quite a bit of fighting amongst ourselves. I mean fighting other company blokes.

**Did you partake in any of this?**

No I did not. No. No.

**You mentioned before about this medical that you had, was that in Brisbane, the one where they got you to all stand round a swimming pool**

23:00 **naked?**

No that was out here in Townsville. That was in Townsville before we went. That was – yes we had to all stand around the pool quite a lot of us because I think we were around three sides of this rectangular large this large pool at Lavarack – all naked – and we had to bend over and the doctor was to come behind

23:30 and have a look. We had to spread the cheeks of our bum so he could have a look and stay in that position until he went right round the lot. Oh dear, yeah. I'll never forget that. How degrading.

**Was that the first time that you'd been naked in front of other men?**

I guess so, yeah. Wasn't nice at all. No.

**So that in itself**

24:00 **was a bit confronting I should say.**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Do you happen to know what the doctor was checking for?**

No.

**I'm just trying to think, what are you going to get from a bum? Anyway.**

24:30 **What about alcohol? Could - in Queensland could you drink at 18 or 21?**

Twenty-one, so we all used to - we were all underage drinkers down at the Langs Hotel, where we used to go to the Goose Club raffle on Saturday. So we were all, we all started drinking down there round about 18 years old. And 21, so I guess

25:00 some of us were in Vietnam at - before the age of 21, when we were not allowed to have a drink and doing what we had to. That's a wonderful conflict isn't it? They train you to kill people, and perhaps we were, before we were 21. We were not allowed to have a drink in Queensland,

**How old did you have to be to vote?**

25:30 Twenty-one.

**I hadn't really seen the joke until now, that's quite funny, you can't drink or sign up..**

Or vote. But we were trained.

**But you can kill people on behalf of the government.**

Of government to stop the communist hordes coming down.

**Can you remember about TV coming in**

26:00 **in the mid 1960s in Australia? Do you remember the sort of gadgets that were in the homes? Did you have a radio, record player..?**

Yeah. In the - yeah we - before TV

26:30 Dad used to go to bed listening to the radio. He used to have a little radio and go to sleep and the radio would be on, I remember that. And then later on, of course yeah, we had TVs, radiograms.

**And what about sports, were you a keen sportsperson?**

I was fairly keen. Yeah I represented Townsville in hockey, playing hockey.

27:00 **Did you also play hockey in the army?**

No. No hockey. We were encouraged to play rugby. Which was an army game, rugby.

**Union.**

That's right, rugby union.

**How were you at that?**

Well it was rugby union, no one really knew the rules cos we'd never played it before. And

27:30 sort of an all in brawl. I was quite good at it. I was mentioned a few times, probably a I don't know, I was probably - I was small, relatively small but I was fairly tough I guess. So I didn't mind mixing it up with everyone. Yeah.

**Now tell me if I'm wrong, but was it**

28:00 **six weeks of initial training?**

Yes, six weeks before leave. And then a three day leave pass. And then another six weeks of initial recruit training. So three months and then another short period of leave and then another 12 weeks, another three months of corps training. So the recruit training first, and then, that's everyone and

28:30 then after the recruit training, you went to your respective corps and so half of the fellows that went and left they went to other - sigs [signals corps] training and the rest of us stayed at Singleton. To do the infantry corps training. So six months I did at Singleton.

**So you first went on leave, where did you go?**

29:00 **Your first leave break?**

First leave? Townsville, came home, got my car and then drove back again.

**So you bought a car now?**

I had a car in Townsville, I left it behind and then after I got my car back to Singleton, then when we used to have leave we could go to wherever we liked. So for a few days, wander off down to Sydney.

**And when you say, 'we,' you're talking about mates, or one mate?**

Oh

29:30 mates, by this time, I mean you knew everyone in, you know, everyone in the barracks. Got to know everyone very well. Yeah, so there was always someone to go somewhere with.

**So this is the end of the 1960s or beginning of the 1970s, is that right?**

Yes.

**So Sydney would have been a bit of a swinging town then.**

I think it was. Yeah.

30:00 We used to migrate up The Cross, Kings Cross. Pubs and clubs and shows that were on. Yeah. It was a good time.

**So you were saying you were quite shy when you were younger, how did you fare with the girls then?**

Well, I think when - on leave most of our time was spent

30:30 around the pubs. And we'd go - in Sydney if we were on leave - we'd go down and the pubs were - apart from up The Cross where we'd go, we'd go to Coogee and Manly and there are always girls around but I think us - mainly us young army blokes were into the boozing a lot, too much. So yeah.

31:00 No serious girlfriends. None at all really.

**And of course if you boozed too much, you couldn't do anything anyway.**

I suppose so.

**What about The Cross, did some of the men go and see the girls working The Cross?**

Working girls? I guess so. I guess they did, I didn't.

31:30 I'm sure some of them would have, yeah.

**Did you have lectures in the army about catching VD [Venereal disease] and..?**

Oh, no, not when we were in Singleton and going to Sydney oh no, no. Later on that occurred.

**Before you went to Vietnam?**

Oh in Vietnam.

**Tell us about The Cross in the late 1960s,**

32:00 **what was it like?**

I can't remember much, just that the - we went and saw the musical Hair, I think and the pubs always had groups playing, Sunday afternoons and always parties to go to and things, you know, it was I guess, pretty free

32:30 and easy time. Yeah.

**Was the Coca Cola sign there?**

No drugs. I can't remember any drugs either, no can't. Coca cola sign? Can't remember.

**The end of William Street going towards Bondi?**

Can't remember.

**I've always wondered how long that's been there.**

33:00 **So the corps training that you did, how did that differ to the initial recruit training, if you like?**

I think it was just more of the same but more detailed, more intensive. Weapons, weapons and tactics and the physical, build us up physically, so -

**How would they do that?**

33:30 Physically? Oh we did something called, circuit training, which they still do in the army. So indoor, a lot of - a circuit. So you'd do a lot of different fitness things, and intensive -

- 34:00 quite intensive sessions, perhaps 40 sessions at a go and a lot of upper arm, rope climbing, strength building and aerobics so you're building up your body for - your breathing and your strength and then outside the
- 34:30 fitness gym, we did a lot of PT [physical training] as well. So that was a lot of running, with weapons and packs and crawling through the scrub, you know, so there was a lot of physical activity in the corps training, which the other corps wouldn't have done. As much of obviously.
- 35:00 But because we were infantry, we needed to be in pretty good physical condition. Yeah. And a lot of lectures, a lot of lectures on weapons and tactics.

**As an infanteer, what were the weapons that you were issued with? Besides the SLR.**

That was it.

**That was it?**

That was what we were issued with.

- 35:30 The SLR. But we had training on various weapons. So our personal weapon, SLR, we had training on lots of weapons, but in particular the M-60 machine gun. Which is an American weapon and then the Armalite which is the American M-16
- 36:00 and the M-79, which was short barrel grenade launcher, which were our main infantry weapons. And then the mines, claymore mines, hand grenades, training with those and we also had a bit of earlier weapons in case we were run across those. So we had the Bren gun and older
- 36:30 weapons, Thompson machine gun, but we did a little bit on those as well. But weapon handling was every day. Training was just about every day.

**Did you feel like you were at the absolute peak of your fitness by the time you went to Vietnam?**

Yes. So after the corps training, so the first three months

- 37:00 recruit and then another three months corps, so there was six months leading in and then the second six months of training up here in Townsville was just a follow on. So after 12 months of training, ready to go to Vietnam, yeah, we were in peak of fitness. We were, as much as they could get us to be.

- 37:30 **Have you ever returned to that level of fitness since then?**

I retained that level for quite a while. Never returned to it, no, but not now of course, but I retained that for quite a long while, that fitness.

**Having been in Vietnam, do you think that fitness is an imperative of the army that, that is extremely important, or not that important?**

- 38:00 Oh extremely. Extremely important, I do.

**What about smoking, did you smoke then?**

Yes, smoking, the army most people smoked in the army. And during lectures or even on parade, we would have breaks

- 38:30 and we were not allowed to smoke unless we were told we could. So at the break of a lecture we were then told, well smoke if you wish, if you don't smoke, go through the actions. And even on parade if we were doing drill, we were allowed to have a puff on parade, as long as the butts didn't hit the deck. So we'd put the butts in our pocket, you know, put them

- 39:00 out and put them in our pocket. But yes, smoking, most of the blokes smoked. And drank.

**Was it like the Second World War, in the sense that the men would be given tobacco rations, you'd be given smokes?**

We were not given cigarettes in Australia, no. We were in Vietnam. Given packets of three, issued to us, little packets of three, American issue.

- 39:30 So we had I think we had as many of those as we liked. And of course, cigarettes were so cheap, 15 cents.

**A packet?**

Yeah, 15 cents a packet.

**Can you remember what you got paid?**

No. \$28. I think.

- 40:00 **A week?**  
Yeah, I think it was \$28.  
**So you weren't in it for the money?**  
No, none of us were in it for the dough.
- 40:30 End of tape

## Tape 4

- 00:33 **You were talking about some of the facilities in Singleton, in terms of the training courses and things that you would do and navigate, can you give us a bit of a picture of the**
- 01:00 **overall facilities of the place that you'd be using on a daily basis in terms of rifle ranges and things like that?**  
Okay, from what I can remember there were about four or five large barracks, side by side and in front of them was a large grassy area and opposite that grassy area, like a field, it was, were other
- 01:30 barracks which was another training company. So I guess where we were, about five large, there would have been about 200 of us I think, and down a pathway to our left, was the mess and the gym and around to our right was the
- 02:00 what was a reserve where we did our training, our physical training and our tactics. Our military training in this army reserve. We were not far from the township of Singleton and we did force
- 02:30 march from I think the township of Greta to Singleton. I think it was the end of our corps training, that was about a 20 mile march with weapon and pack and we also did overnight training in the area and
- 03:00 ambushes and so the - I think that area of Singleton a large part of it is a military training area. And yeah, that's about what I can vaguely remember about it. We didn't go far from our barracks, we didn't go far from the barracks, our mess and
- 03:30 the gym and the training area, that was it, that was our area.  
**So how many units might be operating on the base at any one time?**  
I don't know how many training companies there were, I think there may have been three. But I know there were at least two training companies. Yeah, at each intake.  
**So it would have been abuzz with activity.**  
It was. Yes.
- 04:00 But we were concentrated amongst ourselves and so we never really got to know what was going on in the whole barracks. Just our own area.  
**All that physical workout would have been building up your appetite, what kind of tucker did they have you on?**  
I can't remember, what our food was like at Singleton.
- 04:30 But if I can't remember, it must have been alright. I'd certainly remember if it wasn't any good, And I cannot remember a wet canteen, so perhaps there was no boozier for us doing our training. Perhaps there wasn't I don't think there was.  
**Would any of the fellas nip off into Singleton and**
- 05:00 **go to the local?**  
Not that I'm aware of. As far as I know we were not allowed to do that, we were certainly not allowed out at night time to go into there, no. We did - and in the first 12 weeks there was only one leave pass and that was to go wherever you liked, as I said, I went home but in the second 12 weeks, I think we got a few leaves to go away and I know we went down, as I said, we went to Sydney a few times,
- 05:30 but I don't think we were allowed out at night to go into Singleton. And I guess that was the way it should be. I don't suppose you'd want to be - you're doing your corps training and I don't think they'd want you going into Singleton and getting full and then coming back the next day and not being able to cope.  
**Particularly early days.**  
Well that's right. Be a waste of time wouldn't it.

06:00 Trying to teach you and naturally young blokes, you'd be playing up if you were in Singleton at night time, so.

**In terms of rounds, did you have a allotment, did you have to keep tabs on the amount of rounds that you were using? If you go to a rifle range were you allocated a certain amount of rounds**

06:30 **or was it just open?**

I don't think there was any allocation. We were not made aware that there was allocation. And I don't think that we were ever restricted in the use of ammunition as we hear nowadays that there are restrictions on the use of it. No. I don't think so.

07:00 **What about the fellas who were teaching you who had been over to Vietnam, was there any particular things that you recall that you were taught or told specific to their experience of Vietnam? Did they give you any clues to what you may have been getting yourselves into?**

No. I - we had the utmost faith in the fellows that had

07:30 been to Vietnam, they appeared to be very good instructors and one of the NCOs who had not been to Vietnam, was always threatening that if we did not

08:00 if we weren't concentrating or if we weren't learning enough that it was going to cost us our life. He was always constantly making these threats. But most of the NCOs, the returned fellows were quite good. With experience and they were freely getting it to us, you know, things that we should learn.

08:30 **Were there any NCOs who stood out in that, of returned..?**

Any that stood out?

**Yeah I guess..**

There was one very likeable fellow who had been and was our instructor and then came up to the 2nd Battalion as well, He left the

09:00 training battalion and came up to our battalion in Townsville and went over with us and he had a short tour because he, I believe, he was returned to Australia for mental reasons. So he must have had a breakdown over there.

09:30 I think mental problems were there, wasn't common but these problems were there.

**Now what about mates**

10:00 **had you started to make some solid mates at this stage?**

Oh yes. Yes a number of mates. Yeah.

**And were they fellas that were core to your unit or core to your barracks or..?**

Well, mostly the fellas you got very close to were in your barracks.

10:30 But recruit training, the ones you got close to in your barracks in recruit training, well half of those disappeared at the end of recruit training because they went to their different corps. In corps training, the ones that you were close to in your barracks were once again, at the end of corps training half of those blokes disappeared because they went to other - different infantry units. But a number of

11:00 them came up to Townsville. So got close to a number of them. And still friends with them.

11:30 **How did the training - why did they move you up to Townsville in the first place to do your second six months?**

Okay. We had a choice. Of about three different units

12:00 four, three different units I guess and included in that was the ARU. Australian Reinforcement Unit. Now if you went to - if you volunteered to go to ARU, well then you were on the next plane to go to Vietnam when they needed more infantry fellows. The problem with that was that

12:30 if you went over as a Reo, a reinforcement, you were put into a battalion where you knew no one and that, to me was not the way, if you've got to go to Vietnam you really needed to be going with a unit that you'd trained with and knew your - the blokes that you were going to be depending on. So

13:00 ARU was out for me, I didn't want to go there. And I guess the second choice would have been a battalion that was somewhere else, perhaps in Adelaide or Sydney and I wasn't - the alternative, the only choice for me was to go back to Townsville and go home. And Townsville, 2nd Battalion was on the

13:30 list to go to Vietnam but we weren't sure when. And so I was posted - put my name down for Townsville

and was posted to Townsville. Still not fully aware that Townsville had been put on readiness for Vietnam. So really when I got back home, it was then I think I would have realised that

14:00 six months was what we had before posting, to Vietnam.

**So you had a few mates that came up with you to Townsville?**

Yes. They

14:30 but when they came up, we were then spread out through the battalion so the battalion had three rifle companies and a support company so four companies altogether and so the friends that I came up with were spread out through, now once you got into the battalion, really the only blokes that you got to know were your company blokes. And more importantly

15:00 the blokes you were with in your platoon. So those other friends that - mates that I'd made at Singleton, rarely saw them. So in our training at Townsville, training was done by company, so one company may be out somewhere, it may be up at Mount Spec or at high range or, and then you'd be back here when another company was out. So our six months training in Townsville

15:30 quite intensive but restricted in the fact that you only worked with your own blokes, you know, company blokes.

**Which company did you end up in?**

I was in charlie company, 2nd Battalion. So I guess I could quickly think of five or six fellows from

16:00 corps training who came up with me. We were all mainly, we were all Queenslanders, I think. Most of us were Queenslanders, yeah. That's right.

**So another intensive six months, you're in Charlie company. So tell us about the other fellas in your company that you got to know.**

16:30 Oh okay. In my platoon? The platoon sergeant was an ex-South Australian copper [policeman] a very nice fellow and very well respected and well liked bloke. Relatively young, we were 20, he would have been 27 or 26. He had already been to Vietnam and the NCOs,

17:00 our NCO, corporal was an older fellow, he was the oldest fellow in the platoon, he would have been about 34. Or maybe 36 and he had been to Malaya and Vietnam and the other two platoon sergeants- getting back to our platoon sergeants, there were three platoon sergeants and the

17:30 other two had also been to Vietnam so there was quite a bit of experience in the company. There were three platoon sergeants had been and the NCOs from my platoon, two or three of them had also been to Vietnam and we had - when I marched in there were about

18:00 three only regs, regulars in my platoon, three or four and the rest of them were nashos. One Aborigine, he was a reg. and all good blokes, all good blokes. What else can

18:30 I tell you? We all knocked about together at night time in Townsville, all got to know each other very well, and never any conflict amongst the blokes in the platoon.

**Where would you go to in Townsville?**

19:00 We used to probably go - the particular place that I used to go to before I was called up on the Saturdays, well we spent a lot of time there, that hotel and a number of other different hotels we would go to that were sort of charlie company hotels.

19:30 **So each platoon had their own hotels?**

No company, company, yeah. So we were not to go drinking at the Sun, the Rising Sun Pub, because that was B company's pub, we wouldn't go there. And they were not to go anywhere near

20:00 Langs Hotel, or the Seaview, because that was ours.

**The Seaview on The Strand?**

That's right it was a different pub then. What else would we do? Weekends we would go swimming, used to go up to Crystal Creek, which is north of Townsville and Rolling Stone.

20:30 But there was not a lot of time for that sort of relaxation. The training became quite intensive and quite a lot of it in that six months and not a lot of leave.

**In what way?**

Well it was full on training for Vietnam. Lots of exercises, in the training areas around Townsville, High Range and Mount Spec,

21:00 it was - and Shoalwater Bay of course. Which was a major exercise. The training involved all of the

things we were going to use in Vietnam, a lot of chop – helicopter work, a lot of

- 21:30 work with APCs, Armoured Personnel Carriers. We spent considerable time in the rainforest of Mount Spec where there were tics and leaches and snakes and all sorts of things and we, it was where
- 22:00 Mount Spec, we were on an exercise up there when Alex, our platoon sergeant, called out for volunteers for a course and, “Anyone want to do this course?” And I thought, I don’t like being here in this, it’s raining and there’s a dirty big beehive above us and there’s bees and there was a – and a snake which is about as long as this room and about this big,
- 22:30 he was hovering around and tics and leaches and, “Anyone to do this course?” And I said to Alex, “Yeah, I’ll do it.” He said, “Alright, then you’re out of here on a chopper and back to Townsville.” And when I got to Townsville I realised the course was in Sydney at the School of Military Engineering and so I went to
- 23:00 SME for a course in assault – it was an assault pioneer course which was a course in demolitions, an intensive six week course. So I was trained to be an assault pioneer or the role of a field engineer which was to defuse mines
- 23:30 in the field. And I thoroughly enjoyed that course. It got me out of the scrub and then when I returned from that course, to Townsville the company had already been through Canungra, which was the training exercise everyone had to go through so then I was shot down
- 24:00 to Canungra. And did that training course down there.

**How did you find that?**

Okay. I know now it was a fairly hard course but it was something we had to do. It was okay, found it alright. It was during one of the training exercises

- 24:30 at Shoalwater Bay where very near the end of our training, in preparation for leaving and we were issued with live ammo, and it was then that I realised the weight that we were going to have to carry so that was a surprise. All our previous exercises was with blanks, very light but live ammo was such a difference
- 25:00 and that was also where our platoon sergeant – platoon commander, the officer in charge of us and the company commander got the sack at Shoalwater Bay. So we were training as a battalion I believe and everyone was being assessed
- 25:30 and obviously our company commander and our – my platoon commander were not up to it. So at this very late stage we got a new company commander and a new platoon commander which was just before we left to go to Vietnam. And our new company commander got us all back in Townsville here and all into the lecture room and gave us his view on the war in Vietnam. Which
- 26:00 although it was his view, it was the only one that we’d had at the time. So he –

**What did he tell you?**

Well, he had been there. Working for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. He became quite a well known and – man. He went to Vietnam as a

- 26:30 captain in charge of – and became in charge of a private army in the highlands of Vietnam and working for the CIA and they had – they I believe got him out of the country because they – he became a threat with this large private army that he had. The Montagnards [Vietnamese mountain dwellers]
- 27:00 didn’t like the communists or the VC [Viet Cong] but somehow Barry Peterson became a threat, anyway he was –

**Became a threat to who?**

Became a threat to the Americans. And he had to leave Vietnam, now he was in Canberra when our

- 27:30 CO [Commanding Officer] was sacked and from Canberra, he came to join us. And it was, obviously they realised, they must have known that he was back in Vietnam. Now he got us in the lecture room and had this big map of Vietnam and explained to us what had been happening in Vietnam and the people and the culture and
- 28:00 gave us a thorough overview. The first time I believe that we had had anything like it. And he was an unusual officer and became very well liked by the diggers.
- 28:30 When we went over there we didn’t know him at all but he became very well liked, as did the platoon commander. Who came in as a replacement at the last minute. He also became a very well liked officer when we got there. So really that – in our last – the short period before we went over
- 29:00 these things occurred. And Major Peterson tried to make us more politically aware of what was

happening over in Vietnam.

**That must have been reassuring, to actually have someone..**

He was a very reassuring character, very confident,

29:30 he - and a very distinct, crisp and clipped accent. And very much an officer, but also as I say, very well liked. When we got over there. An unknown quantity before we went.

30:00 **It must have been - did it give any apprehension to the fellas in your platoon, getting a new platoon commander at such a late stage.**

Yes, we were concerned. However the platoon commander was requested by the company commander. So - our new company commander, knew of this fellow

30:30 and asked for him. So obviously he was not an unknown quantity, the platoon commander, the company commander, Major Peterson felt that he would be up to the task and I think the

31:00 commanding officer of the company the OC [officer commanding], Barry Peterson, said to platoon sergeant that - to look after him, to look after his officer. The platoon commander, so Sergeant Alex was to look after Lieutenant Rafferty until Lieutenant Rafferty was good enough in the in country, in Vietnam

31:30 to be the officer in charge. So this was very, tell this to young army blokes now, they don't believe it. But it's what happened because I remained firm friends with Chips Rafferty and - that's what he told us.

**It sounds like an unorthodox order.**

32:00 Well, yeah.

**But it makes perfect sense.**

Absolutely. Absolutely because the platoon sergeant had been to Vietnam before and he was a very competent platoon sergeant, whereas our officer hadn't been but he also was soon up to the task and became a very good platoon commander and immensely respected.

32:30 **Within your other platoon mates at this stage, were you operating on nicknames, by this stage?**

Oh yeah. The nicknames.

**So you were Blue.**

I was Blue, in the company there were about four of us so Blue by surname, so Blue Reynolds, another bloke whose surname was Bruce, Blue Bruce,

33:00 Blue Wilby, Bluey Young. And in the platoon, we had a Greek fellow, his name was Panagaris, his surname was Panagaris but his nickname was Zorba, and then there was another fellow his nickname was Rabbit,

33:30 because, Rabbit.

**How did he get Rabbit?**

Well it's obvious. He had lots of girlfriends. And Hoppy and Chaff, Hoppy and Chaff and Chips and Alex,

34:00 a number of them, I'll remember some of them after. I'll have to have a look at a photograph during our lunch break and get some more names for you.

**And what about the new platoon commander, did he come in with a nickname or did he get bestowed on?**

Well, his name was Rafferty so obviously it was Chips. And that stayed with him.

34:30 Even the diggers called him Chips. "Not allowed to do that he'd say. I'm an officer." "Yes, Chips." Oh dear.

**Did you get to hook up with your dad and your brother when you were in training in Townsville?**

Did I?

35:00 Well yes, we were allowed because I came from Townsville, I was allowed to live out if I wanted to. So I lived in at the barracks and if I wanted to I stayed at home for a few days, oh yeah. That's right, yeah. So still mainly at home.

**But even though it was drawing closer to heading over to Vietnam, and you**

35:30 **knew this.**

Oh yeah. We knew we were going and after all that training and all of the –what they were training us up for was like the constant pickets at night time so we'd be out in the scrub and we'd be on an exercise but we'd- it'd be a

36:00 tactical exercise, so we'd be on picket every night so every section'd have a gun and you'd have to be up for a couple of hours each night to be on the gun. And there'd be flares and pyrotechnics so during the night there'd be lots of ambushes, sprung and noise and confusion and in the end, this was constant training we were getting this, and in the end

36:30 we got so used to this extreme, this noise and the explosions and the flashes and the lights and things going on so you were able to sleep with this going on. You're not supposed to of course, you're supposed to be up and stand to, but sometimes you were just so dead tired that all this noise'd be going on and you'd be able to sleep.

37:00 And of course, it was an exercise, you know exercises, but it was training for what was to come.

**So you're on constant picket, so ambushes could come out of nowhere, you wouldn't necessarily know or be expecting anything to happen?**

No, that's correct. Here in Australia. Of course, there'd be – we'd be fighting an enemy in Australia, on operations, on exercises and

37:30 the training involved a lot of night work. You wouldn't move at night, but you'd set up a harbour at night and – not that we didn't train so much for what we did in Vietnam although we were trained for everything, but specifically what happened in Vietnam was that we ambushed a track every night. So

38:00 but here in Australia they were getting us prepared for contacts. For the extreme, the heightened situation, the noise the gunfire, the explosions and the flashes of light that's what we were getting prepared for.

**How was your own personal confidence before you went over, were you feeling that you were going to**

38:30 **you were able to handle anything?**

Oh yeah, I think so. I think so. I guess we were prepared as we could be. We had the necessary skills and the stamina.

**In terms of heading out to Vietnam, was it - were you aware enough that you could count down the days, or was it..**

39:00 Yes, we got our pre-embarkation leave. We knew when we were going.

**How long was that?**

I think we got a week, got a week's leave. And we then flew out of Townsville, we flew out on a Qantas flight from Townsville in our polyester uniform. And

39:30 an advance party had already left to go to Vietnam but we were in our polys and we flew to Singapore but we were instructed to bring our civvy shirt, just a polo shirt, so when we got off the plane at Singapore, in fact we changed into this polo shirt on the plane because there was a political conflict about an armed unit

40:00 going into Singapore. So if we had our plain shirts on we weren't a military unit. So we changed planes in Singapore and flew to Saigon.

**So it was less about walking around Singapore Airport in disguise, it was more about policy, that you had to put polos on.**

Politics, politics, yeah.

40:30 I don't think the – Singapore was not allowing officially, anyone to pass through on the way to Vietnam. So they way they got round that was to say, well we weren't an Australian army unit passing through, all these guys are on leave or civvies or something.

**Even though it's fairly obvious, but it's a bureaucratic move.**

41:00 That's right.

41:30 End of tape

- 00:32 **Steve, we were just talking about the assault pioneer course before we head over to Vietnam and you'd mentioned that it was mostly demolition. Demolition of what?**
- Unexploded ordinance, in the field. If field engineers were not available well then the infantry used their own and these were the trained assault pioneers to handle that stuff, unexploded stuff that's
- 01:00 out there.
- Did anybody get blown up in doing so?**
- Not with us. No, Not handling that stuff, no.
- Barry Peterson became your major, is that correct?**
- OC, officer - commanding charlie company, that's right.
- And is he still**
- 01:30 **alive?**
- Yes, he is.
- Are you in touch with him?**
- Yes, he lives in Thailand, in Bangkok.
- Tell us about getting the order to leave Australia and go to Vietnam. Were you told with a whole other platoon of people that you were going or were you told individually?**
- It was a - the battalion was ordered
- 02:00 so as a battalion we knew we were going and it was then the departure dates were fixed for each company and that was a 12 month tour. So we were given ample notice, I can't say how long we were told, but we were given notice and then given leave before we left and then we left from Townsville.
- 02:30 **Did you do the thing that a lot of veterans do before they go off to war, and have your portrait taken?**
- We had a group photograph. Not an individual, no I didn't do that. But we had a platoon photograph taken. However I was away doing the assault pioneer course in Sydney when this was taken.
- So you weren't even in it?**
- No.
- And what about your**
- 03:00 **brother and father, did they come down to wave you goodbye?**
- I don't know. There were a lot of farewells in the last week or so and I don't think they would have been at the airport, no I don't think so. I think we were at the Townsville airport for a number of hours waiting to go and
- 03:30 no, I don't think so.
- How was the - what was the feeling in the air with the men going over to Vietnam, was there a relief that you were finally going, to put your training in action or a bit of dread?**
- Oh both I should think, yes. A bit of both. Bit of apprehension but yeah, as well as relief that we were going eventually.
- 04:00 **What were your first impressions of - where did you arrive, in Saigon? What were your first impressions of Saigon?**
- Well the first impression before Saigon was flying over the country and all of the bomb craters we could see, that was - as the plane descended that was the first impression, bomb craters all over the place.
- 04:30 And then this massive airport in - consulate airport in Saigon, with hundreds of military aircraft and then the heat - the humidity that was first impressions. And we weren't there too long before we were flown up to Nui Dat,
- 05:00 by Caribou aircraft.
- You'd mentioned about setting up a 'harbour' when you were in training, what is a harbour?**
- It's a platoon night position. So in a platoon there's three guns, three machine guns, three sections and
- 05:30 each gun, each section has a machine gun and a section commander, section two OC gunner, and a few riflemen, now at night a harbour is a night platoon defensive position at night time. Mainly at night, we could harbour up during the day too, but you - we were always on the move during the day. So it's a

- defensive position at night time. So it's a circle, with the guns
- 06:00 at 120 degrees apart. In the circle. And a gun – someone always awake on each gun. And invariably the gun was placed on a track, at night time.
- When you say, 'a track,' that makes me think of a dolly track for a camera. Is that what it was like?**
- Well it was a foot pad,
- 06:30 where someone would walk. A foot pad through the scrub. A track through the scrub, through the jungle.
- For easy access to the gun?**
- No, no this would be a track that the enemy would use. So during the day we would find a local track through the country. And set up a local ambush site
- 07:00 for that evening. And that evening we would put our gun on that track. In case someone walked along it.
- So it wasn't really defensive, it was really..?**
- Defensive for us it was, but it was an ambush. But getting back to the word, harbour is a defensive position for a platoon at night time but with that defensive position,
- 07:30 rather than just be there for the night, the objective was to ambush anyone that walked along that track.
- I see. So what were your first impressions of Nui Dat then?**
- Well, red dirt. Red dirt everywhere, hot, humid and we were in a rubber plantation.
- 08:00 So first time we'd seen a rubber plantation. And we moved into a previous battalion's quarters. So they'd moved out we moved in and they were fairly run down so our first week was upgrading our living conditions. And also a week of what
- 08:30 was called, 'acclimatisation.' Getting used to it, the heat and the humidity. And a few lectures in that first week about going over what we had already heard but once again, first hand knowledge from the medivac, the medics on the medivac choppers. In that first week we got the
- 09:00 I remember one of the lectures, the army officer who was a doctor, come and spoke to us and he said, what we- "Forget about what you learned about gunshot wounds in Australia, what we're going to do here is if you get shot in the – someone gets shot in the stomach, what you'll do is, you'll have to stop the bleeding," and he said, "What we do was
- 09:30 use any means to stop that bleeding. Because the person is- going to lose the person." So he said, "If the person's on the downward – on the ground with the gunshot wound in the belly, what you'll do is take your hat off and your sweat rag and you'll push that into the wound to stop the bleeding and if it doesn't stop you put anything in there that you can do to stop." So we had clumps of grass around – we were outside where this lecture was – he said, "You'll just grab a clump of grass and you'll force that in and
- 10:00 push anything in that belly to stop the wound from bleeding and the man bleeding to death." And he said, "Whatever you do, is not going to cause the fellow's death, he'll die from blood loss so whatever you do, we can fix up." He said, "To stop the person from bleeding to death." In other words – yeah that's what he said. "Just jam anything in there you could." This was all in our first week, see. In the acclimatisation side.
- 10:30 As well as building – renovating our living – our huts, not huts, tents and getting hot water, we got hot water for ourselves and upgraded. And we also had lectures on getting in and out of choppers by winches, medical evacuations out of the scrub by chopper,
- 11:00 getting in and out on the winch. We had that. And I believe we had the American medivac choppers come over to us and talk to us as well. And we were just – we were just shown around the place. We had live firing on the range there and – before we went out – and saw the artillery and shown around Nui Dat. Yeah.
- 11:30 **Who were the battalion that you were replacing?**
- The 6th Battalion. There were three Anzac battalions, the 2nd Battalion, the 4th Battalion and the 6th Battalion. Anzac, meaning we used rotating Kiwi companies with us. So the Kiwis never had a battalion in Vietnam they had a company always overseas.
- 12:00 The Kiwis'd do six months in Singapore, then they'd come and to 12 months in Vietnam and then they'd go back to Singapore for six months and then they'd go home. And that 12 months in Singapore was attached to an Australian, Anzac battalion, either 2, 4 and 6. So we had half the tour we had a Whisky, which were Kiwis and then we had another company, I forget what their call sign was.

12:30 **Did you have any Kiwi friends then?**

No personal friends but the Kiwis operated slightly differently to us in that they were pretty lax on rules and regulations and so if we were in Nui Dat, between operations, occasionally we used to wander over, in the evening, to the Kiwis' boozer. Because they were - I guess they might have been open more

13:00 often than ours was, or something. You know. So, although we never had Kiwi friends, we were always welcome in their boozer, kind of.

**So your first week of getting acclimatised was very much a matter of taking in your environment.**

That's correct.

**Can you tell us about your first operation?**

13:30 Yeah, they're called operations on active service and exercises, here in Australia. The first operation was a week after we arrived. So 9 platoon that I was in, and Charlie company- we were ordered out and we flew out by chopper into a long grassy area which was the grass was

14:00 in places probably as high as us, it was. So it was very hot, very humid and although we'd be in there for the week, and we flew out in the afternoon to this area of operations, now we landed and we were off

14:30 single file through this long grass. Found a track and harboured up and set up ambush. Now, when we set up the ambush we put the claymore mines outside and the gun on the track. Now, by this time, after we'd

15:00 stand down, stand to is after we - stand to and stand down, do you understand what that is? Well, at last light, of the day, is the most dangerous time because you cannot - you can't see as well as you should - as you normally can so last light and first light are the dangerous times. So that's the time when you don't do anything apart from stand to. Stand to, means you're in your position

15:30 alert and looking out. And that's the position that you will sleep in during the night. After stand down, which is last light. That's when the picket start. So you'll have the machine gunner and the 2IC [second in command] on the gun, they're awake and now at last light, they'll have their two hours or two and a half or three hours and then during the night it keeps on rotating so the ones that have already been to sleep

16:00 they get up and they get woken up and go back onto the gun. So I think it might have been about one or two o'clock in the morning and bearing in mind that this first week was fairly intensive and the heat and the humidity, so I was asleep, must have been a very deep sleep too, because early in the morning

16:30 the explosion, the gun - the claymores went off and then the guns started up. And kept on going. Now the initial explosion and the gunfire, machine gunfire, I thought, I woke, I woke up and then as if in high range here in Townsville I thought, "God this bloody noise." And I nodded back to sleep again.

17:00 For a - must have been just a brief couple of seconds and then realised what was happening. So I got up and I immediately got up, got a weapon, I think we were sleeping with our boots on, this first night. And weapon, stood to, machine gun was, the gun was still going, and I could hear Barry Peterson eventually singing

17:30 because the gun never seemed to stop and Barry Peterson saying, singing out, "Stop firing! Stop firing!" And then it was, "Stop the fucking firing, stop the fucking firing!" Anyway, guns stopped. And then there was a lot of I shouldn't - I wouldn't say confusion, but rushing about and

18:00 I realised or we were told that the reason Peterson wanted the firing to stop was that the persons who had been sprung he wanted them so that he could - they were able to be identified, so they weren't disfigured so much. Now, so outside the harbour, were two VC. So we thought.

18:30 So my section was ordered to go out through one gun, one gun, my section so a machine that's a machine gunner, 2IC and three or four riflemen and the section commander. We went out through one turned and go out single file, turned abreast and sweep around to the other gun and come back in. So that's

19:00 120 degrees sweep, a third of the circle and come in through the other gun. While we swept around we were to pick up the bodies and drag them around to the other gun and pull them in through that other gun. Now, this was an extremely dangerous thing to do, because, once you're outside the harbour at night time, there's nothing that can be done to save you if you receive fire from the other side, from the enemy's side. We were in the middle,

19:30 because, if we had received fire when we were picking up these bodies, there was nothing that our blokes could do. They couldn't shoot through us. So - and it's an extremely dangerous thing to do, We were out there and we couldn't find the bodies. So we came back in, through the other gun, waited until first light and went out again, got them and

20:00 brought them back in again. Brought the bodies in. Now we then took the – anything that they had on that identified them and buried them in about 18 inches, this was the first week after we'd been there. We buried them in 18 inches face down. Anyway,

20:30 after we'd buried them, halfway through the morning, we were then advised that the CO, the commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion was flying in with some dogs, Labradors, tracking dogs, to follow up their trail, you know, their scent. And so he flew in with the dogs and an intelligence officer.

21:00 And we were then ordered to dig them up again. So we dug the bodies up again and cleared away the dirt from their faces and photographs were taken. And eventually these two were identified as North Vietnamese officers. Those two blokes had, were both carrying AK47 [Kalashnikov] weapons

21:30 with torches strapped around their, torches attached to their head. Strapped on with rags, so they had a torch on their head, facing out and a rag around to hold it there and carrying their weapons and that's how they were walking along. Bev Jansen and I and a few others, Murphy, christened these two, this is how

22:00 I don't know how you'd get over these sorts of things but the – in the army and in war time the humour is very black humour. Now these two were christened, 'Jonny and Kim.' Jonny and Kim, now after Jonny and Kim were reburied and the photographs taken and identified we then followed those tracks up. However

22:30 the job was too big, I believe for one platoon so 8 Platoon, came in. And we followed them up for I think it was a couple of days, two days or so, and then in the afternoon of the second or third day, we heard an explosion which was not far away in the jungle,

23:00 perhaps five or seven hundred metres. And was – sounded like to us, like claymore mine. Well then immediately the radio tracker, platoon commander was informed that a booby trap had claimed the lives of Neil, and Tully from 8 Platoon and these were two fellows

23:30 that I had done my corps training with in Singleton. And Tully and 'Pull-through,' was the nickname, they were both tall, skinny blokes. Number one and number two on the gun. We rushed across through the scrub, across to this contact and by the time we got there medivac choppers had come in and taken the two bodies away and also another fellow who had had his knee

24:00 blown apart with shrapnel and another one had a shrapnel in the neck. And they were all out and the contact scene we had to walk through, single file through the scrub and we were told that Tully and Pull-through had put the gun down the, machine gun down for a break, they're still on the track and the – put the gun down as you stop for a brew, you put your weapon down

24:30 right near where you are and the machine gun, they're heavy so you wouldn't normally lie it down on the ground you'd – if there was something a bit of a rise, you'd put it on that or you'd put it on a log or you know. Now put it on the log, the log, we believe had a trip wire to a claymore in the tree. So it was an ambush site for us, at us and anyway it claimed us, Tully and Pull-through. So

25:00 within the first week of the – of being in country, just after the first week, we had got the first two kills and lost two as well. That – I became quite close to before. Before we went over. And about that particular contact, I have since and recently spoken to

25:30 the forward scout from 8 Platoon, who was there – who – well what happened is that the scout he didn't see any sign, and after the

26:00 mine had gone off he got down with his bayonet because Tully and Pull-through were finished and he got down with his bayonet to see if there was any M16s in the ground, they're another type of mine. And there was someone in front of him I can't remember but he said,

26:30 "Don't look around." To this bloke, he said, "Don't look around," because Tully and Pull-through were splattered apart everywhere. He said, "Don't look around." And then later on when the engineers came in, the field engineers came in, he overheard one of them saying, after the thing had gone off, "Scout – the scout should have seen the sign." There was a sign there to say that there was a mine there, you see.

27:00 And this particular person, this bloke, had to live with it all his life, that the engineer said, "He should have seen the sign," and he overheard the conversation. It's alright in retrospect to say, "You should have seen the sign," but having failed to see it, you can't condemn him for it. That's one of those things. Anyway he's lived with that all his life, he hasn't ever – he doesn't appear to have ever got over that, But

27:30 that was the thing with that and I guess it's all conflicts and wars, is that you just get on with it. So that was just part of what we were doing and we were two less in the platoon, in the company. They were 8 Platoon, we were 9 Platoon, but they were one of us, they were us, you know. And so

28:00 that, we were just two less. The rest of that operation I can't think of anything eventful that happened. But it was tragic that we lost two, in the first week, through a booby trap.

**Were they your friends from Townsville?**

28:30 No, they were just fellows that I got to know at Singleton and one of them I believe was an only son. Now if you're an only son, you were then able to be exempt from doing active service I believe. And this fellow's mother had written to the minister, Peacock I think

29:00 and Peacock had said that yes, he was exempted however, he said, the young – this fellow one of them said, "No I've trained so much now, I've done so much training, I want to go." So his mother lost a son. Even though there was no need for him to go.

**That's a tragedy.**

29:30 Well yeah.

**So this was your first operation.**

First one, yeah.

**That would have given you a good introduction into what to expect I suppose.**

Yeah. There were – fortunately for me, I never, ever fired a shot. So the tour began

30:00 along – long number of months of drudge work, going – drudging through the scrub and walking through the scrub and the heat and humidity and the torrential rain and always on edge, always – I believe we had too much weight and we had the wrong weapon, weapon was too heavy and too long

30:30 I reckon.

**Which weapon are you talking about?**

The SLR.

**And you thought it was too heavy for jungle fighting?**

Oh yeah. I think we should have had the M16. The American made M16, which was a light an automatic weapon. Plastic, light, ideal for the jungle. But no, we had these things, these big heavy SLRs.

31:00 **How did you deal with the environment? It sounds like an enemy unto itself.**

Yes and at night, in jungle it's very dark and they never told us about barking deers. Barking deers so the first night, one of the first nights out, I heard

31:30 this horrendous noise right near and I thought, "What's that!?" I thought, "That's some sort of an animal." And anyway, we were later informed that's what it was, a barking deer. But we should have been made aware of it. Wonder I didn't let one go, you know, fire at it.

**I suppose it could have even been the VC making calls, if..**

Well I didn't know what it was.

**You know, if you didn't know.**

Didn't know, yeah.

**So how did**

32:00 **do deers bark like dogs?**

Louder, much louder. I never heard it again either.

**Like 'ruff, ruff,' like that?**

No, similar but I'm not going to tell you how, I can't remember now.

**I won't judge you.**

No, the environment was – it was different anyway, yeah. A lot of

32:30 red dirt and jungle and yeah, and dirty big ants and mozzies and what we were led to expect really. And rain, torrential rain and heat and.. different smells, different smells in the jungle. And lots of in the jungle, lots of evidence

33:00 bomb craters and where we'd been through the jungle, lots of empty ration packs and things like that, you know.

**Australian ration packs?**

Oh, American, we used to carry American, so it could have been us. Yeah, could have been us leaving stuff around.

**I mean that's pretty stupid isn't it, as far as..?**

Well I guess it is, but you know,

33:30 coming - on reflection, I guess they might have been able to smell us too, cigarette smoke, you know. Even though we were trained, we were very quiet, cigarette smoke carries, they could have smelled that.

**Do you know if the VC smoked?**

Oh, I'm sure everyone did. I'm sure they did.

**What about aftershave, could you wear aftershave?**

No.

34:00 No, we never used to wear, well we'd be out on operation for quite a while, I think the longest we did was 24 days, but we'd have resupplies, change of greens and socks, food, water, and but you know, usually

34:30 not - you wouldn't have - been able to have a bath in that time. We wouldn't have been able to get clean. Never used to wear underwear.

**Why? Can I ask you why?**

What was the point of it really. Too hot. Something else to worry about, I never used to wear it. No. We got

35:00 one time, earlier on in the operation we were - we flew into the top of a mountain and - called the Nui Thai Vais, and the SAS [Special Air Service] were up there, they'd been to secure the place, to secure the LZ [Landing Zone] and we flew in and SAS left and we were - we couldn't get out, we

35:30 I don't know why. Whether we were to fly out but we ended up running out of food. I think perhaps we couldn't fly out cos of the low cloud or fog or - yeah, low cloud cover. We ended up walking off the mountain. But from that place we could see Bien Hoa, the large American

36:00 base. Near Saigon. And from the top of that mountain I saw that American military plane, I think it was a converted old DC-3 with mini-guns on board. It was called, 'Puff the Magic Dragon.' So we saw that at night time, operating. With a huge - spewing out all these rounds just like

36:30 large fireworks, be just a stream of red bullets coming from the plane down. So obviously something happening at the Bien Hoa military base. We walked off that mountain and halfway up it was a Buddhist temple, pagodas, forget what they're called. I don't know, but a

37:00 Buddhist temple anyway and we had a look around that and then there was a stairway, a stairway down from this temple. And we used that stairway to get down to the bottom of the mountain. Very, very difficult, harder to go down than going up with all of our ammunition and water and food and things, you know. It was extremely

37:30 it was exhausting, getting off it, that particular mountain.

**Why were you put there in the first place?**

Don't know. Don't know. Details, can't remember. Obviously I think the mountains in the earlier years had been used by the VC as a hide out,

38:00 but we didn't find any evidence. So.

**So you'd smell pretty much after 24 days without a bath or shower, but I suppose everybody smelled the same. So you couldn't differentiate.**

Wouldn't know, wouldn't know, no.

**How did you deal with the thick humidity, did you wear something on your head?**

38:30 Had a sweat rag. Every one of us had a sweat rag, army issue sweat rag, which was essential really. Keep the sweat out of your eyes. Yeah.

**And did you have sunglasses?**

No. No sunglasses. No.

**You obviously carried your own water, but was there somebody allocated within the platoon to**

39:00 **carry extra water or anything like that?**

No, carried your own. And we had bladders as well, water bladders so we had water bottles and water bladders, we carried quite a bit of water, six - I think we had six water bottles and a bladder. Every one

of us. And every three or four days,

- 39:30 we'd be resupplied. If we couldn't find the water, we'd be resupplied by chopper. Although on one memorable occasion, we were following, believe it or not we were following an elephant tracks. And we were flown a very long way out of our area of operation into an American area, I think. And we followed these tracks up for five days,
- 40:00 and the OC [Officer Commanding] , Major Peterson didn't want the - a resupply, because once we got the resupply the VC knew we were there. So - and morale was getting down you know, five days following this track and nothing - anyway, I do remember Barry Peter - Major Peterson coming around and trying to lift the morale by this time I had
- 40:30 transferred across to company headquarters and so I was the machine gunner in company headquarters and he'd come round company headquarters and trying to you know, get our spirits up and I think he said, "Well, if nothing by tomorrow, that's it, we'll call this off and get a resupply, get some food, water and things." And it was the evening of that day when one of the platoons
- 41:00 I think we might have been, company headquarters might have been travelling with another platoon, 8 Platoon I think.
- 41:30 End of tape

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **You were just telling us about waiting for..**

Yeah, we'd followed up a track for five days, I think and the OC came round and tried to lift our spirits and informed us that we would, he'd call it off, if nothing happened by the end of that day. And I remember the area, it was scrubby

- 01:00 area and we were in a cleared out area in this scrub. And one of the platoons was sent down to a water course to investigate, and I think to get some water and whilst down there, they sprung a number of VC getting water as well. And
- 01:30 the subsequent contact led that platoon to a bunker system and at this bunker system either then or soon after, the forward scout was - came across a child and
- 02:00 with hand signals he saw the child, the child didn't see him, he looked around to the section commander and said, 'enemy' and he went to shoot the child. And the section commander stopped him. By this time
- 02:30 the child had disappeared. So he kept on going and walked into a - well the forward scout was shot in the chest. Now what had happened was the child had moved back, he was a forward sentry and he'd moved back to an older soldier and this VC shot
- 03:00 this person. Had he killed that child, he would have had his life saved because it wouldn't have occurred, but he was shot in the chest and in fact he had a bandolier of M79 ammo around him. Because he used to carry an M79 as well. And I think
- 03:30 the gunshot caused something to explode anyway that - he was killed as a result of that.

### **How old would the child have been?**

Don't know. Was a child. A child that's all. Young child, You know, with a split second decision that you have to make and the section commander thought, oh I'm not going to kill a child. And we lost one as a result of it.

- 04:00 One of us, you know. These are the things that stay with you all the time. Can't think of any others that you know, come to mind, oh there were many things that occurred, but not you know, not so close as things like that.
- 04:30 Once another time I was at a - we were at a - I was with company headquarters at an NDP. Which is a Night Defensive Position with the cavalry. And we were listening to the cavalry's radio talk at night. Listening in on their network, so they were - they had it on a speaker, quiet speakers and we were
- 05:00 as us infantry, we were inside the NDP, so there was really no need for us to do picket, because the cavalry was looking after us. We were inside as company headquarters but 9 Platoon was out. My old platoon. They were out on an ambush and - in the rubber and once again, ambush was sprung, heard all the noise and plane noise, machine gun and I heard the platoon
- 05:30 sergeant get on the radio to a company commander and the he said, "3-0." Which is, "Company head commander 3-0, this is 303." Answered 33- 3-0. And platoon sergeant, the platoon commander wasn't there so platoon sergeant was in charge. Anyway he said, "I got a nog outside here singing out,"

- 06:00 this was after the ambush, "Singing out Uc Dai Loi Uc Dai Loi Chieu Hoi!" Which means, Australians surrender. "What'll I do?" Bearing in mind it's night, it's in a jungle, or rubber, this rubber, it's at night time. He's obviously wounded, well I think he was wounded, but you can't go out there to get him. It's too dangerous. So
- 06:30 company commander said, "Throw a grenade at him." And so a few seconds later I heard, 'whoof!' And that was the end of it. That was the end of it. Throw a grenade. Once again, all of these things that occurred that - that initial contact
- 07:00 with those two VC, NVA [North Vietnamese Army] officers, so early in the piece, and the subsequent things that happened, like the bloke - don't want to say his name, that was shot for not killing a child and platoon - throwing a grenade at virtually a defenceless person, this
- 07:30 in a brief time, you know, a year admittedly, all of these things and then we were -what - this was all, you know, 'get over it and get on with your life.' But when we came back home, we were virtually thrown back into a society that really didn't want to ask any questions, didn't want to know. And all of these things were with us. Get back to your old life again, no one wants to know, And all of these things spinning round
- 08:00 your head and - but of course we never used to talk about it, but in later years, these things come back and start to get on top of you. And I honestly think that it's the extreme violence of it all in the war - in a war that - at such a young tender age, that causes the mental problems. I don't think you're old enough to cope, physically, of course you can cope with it all
- 08:30 you know, but I don't think mentally it's - some of us weren't strong enough.
- Well it's hard to imagine what could actually prepare you for that kind of thing, really, particularly at that age. It's extreme violence. Was there anything in your training that in any way**
- 09:00 **prepared you for that kind of reality when you got there?**
- Don't think so. No. No. No, of course the training doesn't go into that depth. You don't expect, well I mean, I don't know what we were to expected but..
- Because in training don't they - they would give you a code of conduct or rules of engagement?**
- Well of course we had rules of engagement.
- 09:30 Yes rules of engagement and free fire zones and of course we had rules about when we were allowed to fire and when we couldn't fire. See, when we ambushed at night, well they - the local populations were not allowed to travel at night. In certain areas, And these are the areas that we operated in. So of course, if
- 10:00 someone was travelling at night, moving around the jungle at night, well it was - to us they were VC and invariably they were. During the day we were not allowed to fire on them. But of course, if we came across armed people during the day, VC during the day, that was different.
- 10:30 We were not allowed to fire on any of the population during the day anywhere. Certain rules of engagement which were strictly enforced.
- A lot's written up about the chaos of Vietnam, the lack of front line, examples that you've just cited to us.**
- 11:00 **In a strange way, under all normal circumstances, it'd almost encourage the rules of engagement to go right out the window. That kind of training because -**
- Well, yes. But we did - we did have a strict regime and discipline and we stuck
- 11:30 to it. And I think we were fairly well trained, for working in the jungle. And I think we did it quite well, as you know, I don't know how many - if it was half of us were nashos but a lot of us were nashos. As opposed to the very professional SAS. Who
- 12:00 operated in the jungle in very small teams. But for what we were, I think we were well trained. And did a fairly good job. As opposed to the other forces like the Americans - who didn't appear to be as well trained as we were. That was their
- 12:30 general forces. I think their ranger battalions were better trained. But I think on the whole, like we were just average infanteers and we were a lot better than their average infanteers, I think.
- What was your experience of the average American soldiers?**
- American, we didn't
- 13:00 work with them. My battalion didn't. We saw them, there was a cavalry unit who used to work around

us, or not with us, but they used to be in and out of Nui Dat and they were black, mainly black Americans and fairly careless - I can't say careless

13:30 but they used to operate their APCs [Armoured Personnel Carrier] or tracks as we called them, from outside, so our drivers were inside, everyone was inside, inside the armour plate and you'd drive from inside, these blokes had arranged so that they had a bit of a -sort of an armchair up the top and they'd sit up the top in an armchair, fully exposed. And with a flag flying as well. So a

14:00 fairly cavalier approach I should think to life and death. And although I didn't witness it, but mates of mine had stumbled into bars, Negro bars and before they were identified

14:30 as Australians they were asked to remove themselves. But I think once they were identified as Australians it wasn't so bad. But they did have that racial problem in Vietnam.

**Did it swing back the other way, were there -**

15:00 **was there a bias from the white Americans towards the Negroes as well?**

I don't know. I don't know that. I don't know.

**And how about socially on the base, there's - was there**

15:30 **a lot of drugs within the American forces that you..?**

I can't say that. Where we were, Nui Dat, we had no Americans staying there, with us. So we used to see these trucks coming in and out, these APCs but I don't think they were on our base, they used to come in. Drugs, no, not

16:00 that I'm aware of on the base. There may have been a little bit of marijuana, that's all. I don't think there was much. We had the everyman's, and that was the Salvation Army bloke. He came over with us. And he had a little canteen that we used to go to. And we had our own canteen. Our own boozier. And

16:30 our - in charlie company. And we worked every day of the tour so - of the 12 months, so we didn't have a day off. Every day we were working. Apart from the times that we had rest in country in Vung Tau but our OC who the fellow that I spoke about, Major Peterson

17:00 his thoughts were that we were out in the scrub for month on end, dirty and filthy and come back we were allowed to have a few beers. And the battalion CO's thoughts on that matter was two beers per day, which was the army rule. But

17:30 we were allowed to get as much grog as we could get. And while we were back we used to have a few beers. We'd swap one carton of Australian beer for two cartons of American beer.

**You'd drink the American beer?**

Oh yeah. We wanted volume. We wanted quantity not quality.

18:00 But I believe our OC was warned that we were the only company that was doing it. The other companies weren't doing it. And the CO said to him that, "Be careful, if any of the - if these diggers," like us, run amok through

18:30 the misuse of alcohol well he was in deep shit. It never happened, never happened, no we were right.

**What about marijuana, given the time.**

Oh well the - there was marijuana there on leave, R&R [Rest and Recreation] in Vung Tau, there was marijuana and I dare say, there was some at camp too. I don't know if

19:00 there was much though. I recently went to a reunion and the blokes that were saying, "I used to smoke dope in the lines." And I thought, I don't remember that, you know. So - perhaps there was but don't know.

**Do you think it's more that it could have happened, or more that a story's got exaggerated over the years?**

19:30 I don't doubt that it could have happened and did happen perhaps but I don't think it occurred to a large extent. I don't know. And I would be absolutely astounded if there was anything else apart from a bit of marijuana around the joint, you know. I wouldn't think there'd be anything else.

20:00 No. And apart from - and the booze side of it, was only beer. We were never allowed to drink anything else. So.

**But if you were working seven days a week.**

We used to knock off at 4 o'clock.

**But would any fellas ever end up going out on ops with a bit of a hangover?**

Oh, no, no. We wouldn't - we wouldn't be on the grog the night before an operation. Oh no. No, the boozer'd be closing early.

20:30 Nup. Everything like that was fairly well controlled. Yeah. Oh no, you wouldn't want to be going out on operation with a hangover. No. No.

**What about the use of dogs.**

The tracking dogs.

**Yeah.**

Well after that first operation the dogs - during that first operation when Jonny and Kim were killed, dogs suffered from heat exhaustion. And I think

21:00 they had to be flown out. That's what I can recollect. And we didn't use them much after that. I don't think we used them at all. Black Labradors.

**I guess a black Labrador in a very hot climate is not a good combination really.**

No, they left them over there too, they left them there. They didn't bring them back to Australia. Should have.

21:30 They were expendable, when they pulled out.

**So that was the only time that they were actually used?**

They would have been used with other, maybe other companies, but they were, I think we didn't use them that often. Not often, no.

22:00 **Did they actually give you any success, in terms of..?**

**And what about - I heard lots about the tunnel systems underground with the VC. Did you come across many?**

No, you'd know more about it than I do. No. We

22:30 bunker systems only, but no, we didn't see the tunnels, I think that's a good thing. Wouldn't like to have been there.

**And what about the South Vietnamese in general, how did you - can you tell us about your workings or experiences?**

Okay, with the South Vietnamese, the only ones

23:00 that we worked with were bushman scouts. Now they were - they knew the area and most of them were Chieu Hoi, which - they were - they'd swapped sides, they were VC who had come over to the other side, knew the area of operation. So we would take them out as our scouts, bushmen scouts and they would

23:30 work with our forward scouts. And we didn't work with any of the South Vietnamese operational units Phuoc Tuy was an Australian province only.

**Did you have locals in the camp where you were in Nui Dat?**

Yeah, we had our own scouts. Only a handful of them. Well, Nui Dat was

24:00 was not like an American base, it was fairly restricted as to who could get on and off the - on a site you know and the only Vietnamese were a handful of scouts and I think the barber shop had a couple of Vietnamese and as far as I can recall that was about it. And even the, at Vung Tau, round the base there, there were only a

24:30 handful of Vietnamese working there on base, selling trinkets and things I think, or you know in the gift shops.

**Was there any concern at any stage of the South Vietnamese that were in and around your company, being aligned with -**

Concern. We were always

25:00 suspecting the barber as a VC or apart from our bushmen scouts I think there was only the barber and maybe one or two others. We were always talking about it but I guess that was just us, suspicious of them being on the base and probably thinking they shouldn't be there. But nothing concrete, no.

**So you**

25:30 **told us about your first op and broadly your ops went up to 24 days. What was the main range of operations that you did in your time in Vietnam?**

- Okay. Well, initially, after that first operation, where we flew into that long
- 26:00 grass and I think that was – we flew into there, someone had just pulled out so we were just following up from someone. But after that we had a short period of land clearing so we were protecting the Australian bulldozers who were clearing large tracks of land. And that was to just prevent the VC from the use of this jungle.
- 26:30 And after that, the majority of the time in country I believe was spent in ambushing. What was it called? Oh I forget the term, what type of work we were doing. No I can't tell you that.
- 27:00 No.
- It's more than just patrol.**
- Oh, yeah, yeah. No, it was, there was a term for it but I can't remember.
- It's not search and destroy either, because you're...**
- No, no not search and destroy. No. It was 1970, 1971, so it's getting towards the end of it. When we were replaced by the 4th Battalion
- 27:30 they didn't complete a full tour. Gough Whitlam came in and the 4th Battalion were pulled back. So we were one of the last battalions to do a full tour. And by this time, of course, the VC well knew the reputation of the Australian Phuoc Tuy province and really didn't want to take the Australians on. And that's a fact that the reputation
- 28:00 of the Australians was such that they didn't want contact. I think after the base was closed down it would have changed very quickly.
- Were you aware of that reputation at the time?**
- No. No. Only
- 28:30 well aware that there was not – there didn't appear to be as much – as many contacts as had happened in the past. There didn't appear- there was no – while we were there, there were no major battles. And no large stoushes. Just
- 29:00 the rather infrequent contacts. Small skirmishes.
- Patrols and ambushes.**
- That's right. Yeah.
- Were there – in your time there did you ever come across any fellas who didn't fare terribly well, in terms of what they were being**
- 29:30 **asked to do over there?**
- Yes. Yeah, we – there were a few. One of ours in fact, who always appeared to be in trouble and spent half the time in the country in detention. I guess the reason for that was that he wasn't suitable for infantry, he should have been doing something that he liked
- 30:00 which was building, construction, his background was that. He like doing that sort of stuff and that's what he should have been doing. One or two others had to be returned home, mentally unfit.
- What sort of symptoms would fellas like that suffer from at the time? What sort of things would they do to be**
- 30:30 **declared mentally unfit?**
- Oh, I don't know. I don't know. One of our blokes, I think his hair, I can't state this as a fact, but I believe that his hair, he went grey virtually within a couple
- 31:00 of months of being in the country and he had to return, he I think the stress of it all. And whilst we were there another tragic incident occurred where a – one of the sergeants shot one or two other blokes at Nui Dat, and he was mentally unbalanced as well. He shot and killed them I don't
- 31:30 know if they were his own diggers and I don't think he was in infantry either he was in another corps. But there were a lot of stresses and of course every night the artillery was you know, was going and there was constant – a constant – constantly things were happening, day or night, there was choppers always flying around
- 32:00 there was the artillery always going and something happening all the time. Even, you know, I mean, even in Nui Dat. And when we were out on operations at night time there'd be noise, you'd be hearing in the distance, explosions and gunfire and yeah.
- And would fellas within the company get into fights and brawls with**

32:30 **each other just to let off steam from time to time?**

No. No. Not much. Once or twice it might have happened in the boozier, but no. No. Not at all. No. In Vung Tau,

33:00 there could have been a few fights. With locals.

**Well that seems to happen wherever an army goes.**

Yeah. Alcohol fuelled.

**What was one of the more grisly sights that you came across**

33:30 **in operations in Vietnam?**

Grisly sights?

**Or experiences.**

I think the contact where I told you there was a bunker system and the child was not shot and the other bloke was shot in the chest, well as a result of that there were

34:00 a number of VC shot and killed and they were all dragged into that cleared area where we were based and these bodies were badly shot, they had lots of gunshots and that wasn't a real, there was about five or six of them, we dragged into the

34:30 area and that wasn't real nice. And I can't remember what we did with those. And because, that obviously wasn't in that burial party, but yeah.

**Would that be the normal practise to actually bury bodies after a scuffle like that?**

35:00 Yeah.

**Even VC?**

Yeah.

**And have a dedicated party to - burial party to do that?**

Oh yes, no ceremony, just bury them. After they, all of their personal effects were removed. Weapons and things that they were carrying.

35:30 **Was it hard, living in a place where there was, I guess you were in the comfort zone of Nui Dat, but it's often talked about within Vietnam the fact that the lack of front line, that there was no**

36:00 **back line, no front line, you were on tenterhooks the whole time you were there? Was that part of your experience?**

Well it was. Even in Nui Dat, we did picket at night time and once we were outside Nui Dat on patrols or on operations well then

36:30 well that's right, there was never any front line and that obviously is the one of the major differences comparing Vietnam with other conflicts, the absence of anything like that. And - which relates to I think, why a lot of the infantry blokes have in later life, had problems. You know the constant

37:00 constant stress of it all. Because there was nothing that was defined. But it - you know, it gets back to those rules of engagement and the discipline that we had. So the stresses were there. The only time

37:30 we were able to relax was in Vung Tau, very strange though because we'd discard our uniform and get into civvies and go into the city, in a country that's at war. Hard to believe isn't it, that no doubt there were others in the city as well, that didn't want us there, we never

38:00 seemed to have any trouble.

**Was well know as a VC, R&R place as well.**

I guess it was. I don't know if that's factual but I probably believe that the Vietcong were not going to cut their own throat by - the amount of money that was coming in by the soldiers, coming in and -

38:30 into the bars and the food outlets in Vung Tau and that money filtering out into the community so obviously they weren't going to stop that money coming in, they'd bugger up the economy by bringing the conflict into the town of Vung Tau. And we used to feel, we never felt - well I never felt threatened in Vung Tau. No.

39:00 **You walk in -**

Drunken brawls.

**That's a different kind. So you'd walk in in civvies and no weaponry?**

We'd go to the one ALSG, one Australian Logistics Support Group and that - in there was a Badcoe club, so the Badcoe club had an armoury and accommodation so our weapons would go into the armoury and our greens into our rooms and

- 39:30 into civvies. And then we had two nights, I think, one full day and two nights. So we'd truck down from Nui Dat after the operation and then we would I think - oh I can't sure before or after, but we would soon be around the pool where we would have two free
- 40:00 beers each, nice and cold too, two free beers and then it was leave, we were on leave, do what we like. And I used to - I used to relax around the pool for quite a while, I used to stay there for hours. Most of the blokes would be off, into the bars of Vung Tau. But I was just there to take it easy and relax have a few beers
- 40:30 and wander over to the beach and have a swim. Used to go in in the evening.
- 41:00 End of tape

## Tape 7

- 00:31 **We talked a little bit about the burying of the bodies and you said what happened with Jonny and Kim was that you buried them 18 inches down. Is that standard?**
- Well, I don't know. I don't know if it's standard. But why go any deeper? I mean, it's all work to us and
- 01:00 probably hard work too, so I guess, as long as they were covered. But what I did say, was that they were buried face down. And by this time we were aware that they should have been face up. I think we intentionally did that to antagonise our Vietnamese bushkin [?] scouts.
- Why should they have been buried face up?**
- 01:30 I think that was part of their religion.
- Other than those two mates that you told us about that you lost, because of the claymore mine going off, did you lose any other really close friends over there?**
- No. No I didn't. No. The third fellow from our company who was killed,
- 02:00 was not a fellow that I had trained with so he wasn't close at all. Just these first two.
- I'm assuming that you all got to know each other extremely well.**
- We did.
- Because you know, you're looking after each other's life in a way. Do you know how you were seen, what were you thought of? Were you a funny guy, a tough guy?**
- 02:30 None of those. None of those. I don't know how - I don't know. But none of those, I was one of the guys. So I don't know how you would define that.
- But I mean some people I suppose they know**
- 03:00 **that they're considered responsible, or that they're considered clumsy or what have you, so I guess I'm asking, do you know what you were considered as?**
- Well it must have been dependable because well I guess, eventually I was looking after our own armoury, looking after all of our mines and ammunition and stuff like that. I don't know.
- 03:30 Dependable, someone they could rely on. But certainly not tough guy or smart guy or anything like that.
- But did you have those men in your platoon?**
- Oh, we had the loud blokes, the - yeah, the boisterous ones, the ones who thought themselves they were pretty good with their fists and - oh yeah, yeah. Nevertheless, they were all part of a unit, we all - we're all one part of
- 04:00 a unit.
- Because of those 24 day operations that you had, the absolute exhaustion must have been severe, did you take pills to keep yourself awake or alert?**
- No. No pills. At night, on gun picket, to stay awake,
- 04:30 most of us had very small transistor radios we'd carry in our ammunition pouch. And we would listen to

- armed forces radio, American radio. While we were on gun picket. So people might think, oh that's not the smartest thing to do while you're supposed to be alert, but it really did help us stay awake
- 05:00 the worst thing we could do at night time was fall asleep on gun picket. So. And smoke, now we - most of us smoked at night. On gun picket. Which was something we were not allowed to do. But we all used to have Zippo lighters, cigarette lighters, so you wouldn't be striking a match and with our bush hats and
- 05:30 we'd light our smoke up in our bush hat and we were quite skilled at being able to have a cigarette without being seen. Apart from the fact that the smoke travels. Couldn't see us, but they might have been able to smell us. But we were never ambushed at night time. So.
- 06:00 **That's how the old American Indians used to communicate wasn't it? Through smoke signals and stuff. And you can smell it..**
- You can smell it.
- You went on R&C in Vung Tau. That's different from R&R.**
- R&R, rest and recreation was either to Australia or out of Vietnam.
- 06:30 **Did you do your R and C first, before your R&R, or was it the other way around?**
- Well, what we used to call, was R&C. Rest in Country. And we used to have R&C after every operation, as opposed to the pogos or the units that were not infantry and they had less R&C than we had. I don't know how often they went to
- 07:00 Vung Tau. These are the pogo units that are in Nui Dat. Of course the pogo units that were in Vung Tau well they were there every night. Whether or not they were allowed into the bars and brothels every night, but so we had it after every operation. Virtually every month we were allowed two nights and one day in Vung Tau. So yes, that was before I had R&R.
- So there was something positive in being a grunt.**
- 07:30 A positive aspect of going to Vung Tau and getting absolutely plastered.
- If that could be any positive at all. Something you just brought up which is of great interest to me, is the brothels.**
- Oh, is it?
- Yes. Did you perchance, come across one?**
- 08:00 The only place I can remember, is a - was a club called a 37 Club and that was not really a brothel, that was a barber shop.
- Right? So you'd have sex while you got your hair cut?**
- Not really. You'd have a haircut if you liked.
- What a good idea.**
- 08:30 But on the same premises were a number of cubicles, just narrow cubicles, probably a metre and a half wide with a bed on it. So you'd go in there for a blow job [fellatio].
- You're kidding? But you could get your hair cut as well? That would appeal to the practical ones out there.**
- 09:00 **So the beds would have been single beds then. How did you know about it?**
- How did we know about it? Well, I don't know, it was there. It was just there, in one of the streets, in a street of bars. Was the 37 Club so most of the diggers'd go there first, as soon as they got into town. Into the city of Vung Tau, head off to the 37 Club and
- 09:30 get the job done and then into the booths, into the bars.
- So would the joke be, "I'm going to get my hair cut?"**
- Possibly. Yeah, if you're going to the 37 Club, you were going there and then after that, settle down and for an evening's drinking in the bars wander round all the bars. And by curfew,
- 10:00 you would have somewhere to sleep for the night.
- What do you mean by that? You'd have to be back at the hotel by a certain time or..?**
- We didn't have to be back on base, we could stay in the city and most of us did, stay in the city so, various places we could sleep, you know, there's - Vung Tau, is an old French
- 10:30 colonial town and there was a grand, The Grand Hotel, which was a lovely hotel, right on one of the

beaches. So we could stay there, just book a room for the night.

**I wonder if it's still there?**

It is. It is there. Even got a doorman now. Luxurious place.

**Because friends of mine went to Vietnam for their honeymoon and they said they stayed in the most beautiful hotel, I wonder if that was**

11:00 **it.**

Well, if it was in Vung Tau.

**So at the barber shop, you couldn't have sex, it'd only just be a blow job? Or you could have sex as well?**

Oh I think it was just the first one.

**So would that be for the blokes that didn't - were concerned about catching VD or something like that would go there?**

I doubt it.

11:30 I don't think there were any thoughts about VD. Just didn't worry about it. If you caught it, you caught it.

**But wouldn't it be very painful or..?**

I don't know, never got it. But if you got it well you just had a course of - what was it called? Petracyclin or something, I don't know. I don't know but it was just a course.

12:00 And of course we were warned where not to go and what girls not to pick up and what bars not to go into and the bars not to go into always had a sign out the front saying, that military police had put it there, you know, not to go in there. But, yeah.

**Did the blokes go in there anyway?**

Oh, invariably. Get full of booze, just do whatever you like really.

**But why would they**

12:30 **go in there, because the girls would possibly be cheaper than in the ones that were okay to go and see?**

Oh, well, not necessarily, it might have been a better type bar, the signs on the wall say not to go there would only have been put there because the girls - it would have been made known that the girls had diseases. So but

13:00 you know, at ten o'clock at night after six or seven hours drinking, you're not really worried too much about these sort of things, you just -

**So you said you were a shy fella?**

Oh well, yeah. I was shy, yeah.

**So was it in Vietnam that you first lost your virginity, or had you done that before you went overseas?**

Before.

13:30 You ask that all the time, do you?

**Only to the men that I think will answer it, but..**

Before.

**Because I had heard from one Vietnam veteran that he was in a very bad situation and he said, "Oh shit, I'm going to get killed and I haven't even lost my virginity." So I always think about that poor guy. Well actually he lived**

14:00 **of course we interviewed him, so. But that's all he was thinking about.**

Was he?

**Which I think is quite funny.**

It must have been early in the piece. Because once he'd been there to Vung Tau he would have been right.

**So that was a big part of R inC [Rest in Country] I can imagine is you know**

14:30 **going down, getting plastered and having sex, forgetting your worries and all that.**

Getting some girls, yeah.

**I've also heard that the Vietnamese women were very beautiful, is that correct, in your opinion?**

Yes. At the time the - they were Eurasian girls there, and - from the French, see the French were there. And perhaps they were outcasts

15:00 the way that the American half-caste American children are now in Vietnam. They were ostracised and I guess these girls were also outcasts and probably working in the bars, like most of them were, trying to support their families. It was something that was necessary. And

15:30 I don't think you could hold that against them, they were supporting their parents, whatever, you know. So yes, they were very pretty.

**Something I've wondered about is if you could tip the women without mama-san getting that money?**

Many

16:00 of the diggers found one girl and stayed with that girl for the whole 12 months, many of the fellas that I knew. Had one girl and I've no doubt that girl would have had probably a number of different fellows, that were steady ones. I doubt you would have got a girl out of the bar without fixing up mama-san first.

16:30 But of course, there were girls, not working in the bars that were around. Older ones, you know.

**It was more the sort of tipping the girl, you'd pay for her and then tipping her at the end of the night or..?**

I don't know. I think we had to pay mama-san to get the girl out of the bar for the night.

**And then if you wanted to give her any extra money then she didn't have to give it to mama-san.**

Oh that's the way it occurred, yeah.

17:00 **Did much scrounging go on with the dead VC, souvenir taking on behalf of the Australians?**

Oh I think so. Yeah.

**Were they allowed to take them back into Australia? If for example, they took a knife or a..?**

Well, knives, in

17:30 those days, you could have brought them back. And they would have been brought back. What about rings, watches, radios, anything that they were carrying on them on their person when they were killed. They were souvenired. So a lot of that went on.

**And you said, when you were out there on an operation, on a picket,**

18:00 **did it ever happen that - besides the first operation you told us about - that actually there was conflict at night?**

A contact?

**Yeah, did that happen quite frequently when you were on a picket or..?**

For me personally, no. But I moved away from 9 platoon and became a gunner in company headquarters. So most of the contacts

18:30 occurred with the platoons out in - and they had - my old platoon, 9 platoon, had a number of contacts during the tour of Vietnam. Quite a few contacts but no lives were lost out of 9 platoon. So we were quite lucky.

**What gave you the opportunity to go and work at the headquarters?**

Well I think, perhaps the - my assault pioneer training,

19:00 anyone with a special skill was put into a position where you could have been made available at any time and I think that's why I ended up in company headquarters. But then I ended up with the gun. Machine gun so it wasn't much of an advantage to me, lugging that damn big heavy thing around the scrub.

19:30 **Were they the guns that came apart in three different pieces?**

Yes, you could, yeah. But you never carried them in pieces. I mean, carried them as an operating weapon.

**The whole thing?**

Yeah, the M60. This was an infantry weapon, we're not talking about a big - it's just a machine gun.

20:00 **How much did it weigh?**

Off-hand I can't tell you. Heavy. Heavy. And all of the rounds, you carried 600 rounds, that's six belts, plus your water and your food and the gun. And number two had, number two on the gun had a spare barrel because the barrels used to get hot so you have to change barrels

20:30 in a contact if it got too hot and whack the other barrel on. So we had a lot to carry.

**This sounds like a bit of a fairy [weak] question, but couldn't you share the workload, couldn't you say.. look I've been carrying it for an hour, you carry it?**

Oh we did. Oh well, we did - no, no, no, no. We shared the workload with our ammo, but no you didn't give the gun away, once you had the gun, that was yours. We didn't share it with anyone

21:00 because, number one and number two on the gun worked as a team. No it wasn't shared.

**I see.**

That was just part of the training.

**Something that's occurred to me is, did you come across any gay blokes, in your platoon?**

Not in my platoon.

21:30 **So you know of some that were there?**

I don't want to answer that.

**You don't have to mention any names. Would they be booted out and sent back to Australia? Or tolerated and put on the front line?**

22:00 Certainly wasn't booted out. And tolerated is not the word to use. No. No.

**That wasn't any judgement on my behalf by the way. It was more or less - suppose I'm talking about**

22:30 **recent navy things that have come to life about bastardry towards gay people, but just wondered if the other infantry men supported that person so that they wouldn't be treated harshly by the military.**

Well we - most of us were not aware, or didn't believe this was this

23:00 person was like this. And this person had the utmost respect of the blokes. And whether or not - I think that the army was aware, of

23:30 of it.

**What about R&R? How long must you have been in operations until you were actually got to come home to Australia?**

I don't know. Some of the blokes only went over there for three or four months and then they were nashos and their time was up so they got out. They would not have got R&R. But I think it was about six months.

24:00 Before you were allowed to go on R&R.

**What about you, did you come home?**

I came - I was - I'd made a booking to go to Taipei. But it was changed and I returned home to Australia, came home to Townsville.

**It was changed by you or your supervisor, your OC?**

It was changed by him at my request.

24:30 It was - what do you call it? It was special, a special arrangement. What do you call it? Well my Dad's half sister was dying of cancer and she had looked after my brother and myself in our early years

25:00 and when I became aware that this was happening, while I was in Vietnam, asked the OC if I could come home and he made it, he got it changed on the spot and asked - soon after the request I was off, I was out of the place and I was on the way home. And I flew to Brisbane and in those days, when you came home to Australia on R&R, nothing was booked, the army hadn't made any arrangements, so it was up to

25:30 the person to go across to the Ansett desk or the TAA [Trans Australia Airlines]desk in Brisbane or Sydney wherever it was, Sydney we flew into, and make your own arrangement. And because we were in uniform, as soon as, if you mentioned to them that you were on R&R from Vietnam we were shoved

- on the next flight, so I got a flight home to Townsville and then when I got home I found out that
- 26:00 my aunt as we called her, had been transferred to Brisbane, so I then turned around and went back to Brisbane and spent my R&R in Brisbane. With my aunt. And then back to Vietnam and after returning to Vietnam, I was – company was out on operation
- 26:30 and I was put on a chopper a resupply chopper at Eagle Farm, where – Eagle Farm was our LZ, our landing zone. Charlie Company landing zone and I was put on this chopper and, oh it had lots of stuff on it, food and ammo and water and the two gunners and me. And all of my gear as well, my backpack and my
- 27:00 ammo and water and weapon. And the chopper took off and he flew down the road, then there's rubber trees around and he had to fly down the road because of the rubber, and he couldn't get up and the tail was up and the nose was down and he was trying to get elevation and the damn thing was, 'thump-thump – thump,' and it wasn't doing anything and the gunner leaned over to me, and he said, "When I tap you on the shoulder,"
- 27:30 he said, "You start throwing all that shit out." So the pilot had warned the gunner to be prepared for a crash or get this stuff off the chopper. "All that, chuck it out," he said. And I looked at him and he said, "Yeah." And I waited and waited and ever so slowly it got elevation and we were right.
- So you didn't have to throw it overboard?**
- 28:00 **What would've happened? Would it all have gone off?**
- No. Wouldn't have, tins of ammo, no it wouldn't have gone – water, jerry cans of water and food, might have landed on someone down below though. Because we were in Nui Dat, we weren't outside. And we were flying down the road, might have hit some poor old land rover driver
- 28:30 on the head. If I'd thrown it out. But yeah, they'd overloaded.
- This was to get you back to your unit? Were you the only one sitting in the helicopter besides the other two?**
- Me and all this stuff, all this resupply.
- Jeez, that's a hairy incident.**
- 29:00 **Did you end up in any punchups yourself?**
- No. No.
- What kind of blokes were the ones that ended up in punchups, the more aggressive types or just the ones that couldn't handle their booze maybe?**
- Oh, I wouldn't say not aggressive ones, one of the fellows – and very good friends of mine, one was an Irishman, he used to be in the
- 29:30 Irish guards and he was a musician in the Irish guards and Derrick was always getting into blues. Always. And good bloke. He was either punching someone or someone was punching him. And Zorba, Zorba was fit, he was strong, fit and Zorba was always having a blue. But not usually with us though, usually someone else.
- 30:00 In Australia here, with one of the other companies, not amongst ourselves. Another one, Mickey Alcote, he was good mate of Zorba's so he'd be backing up Zorba or Zorba'd be backing up him down at the Allen, before we left, you know, half full of grog. Yeah, really was all good fun.
- 30:30 **Did you kind of laugh at them?**
- Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Derrick'd have a black eye and, "Oh Derrick." You know. No one ever bothered about it.
- Now you mentioned before that you had American ration packs. Can you tell us what was in a ration pack?**
- From what I can remember.
- 31:00 Tins. Tins of meat, beef, and tins of fruit, chocolates, lollies and coffee, sugar, tea and rice and cigarettes, matches, can openers, things like that. But they were quite large. I mean
- 31:30 they were large and heavy. So we used to cull them. And we would throw out the tinned fruit and the stuff that we didn't need, we'd cull it before we left Nui Dat, just take the necessary stuff. The Australian ration packs, also had tins in them but they were smaller and then we used to have the dehydrated ration packs which were – which were ideal.
- 32:00 For the jungle, you know for an operation. But didn't like them much, dehydrated stuff, it wasn't really nice. But it was light.

**Did you come across the American infantry men..**

No.

**I know you were at headquarters, but just anyway, just -**

No, never came across them. See, Phuoc Tuy was our province and they didn't work in

32:30 our province. And we - as far as I can recall - we only went out of our province once. And we never came across the Americans, no. Getting back to our ration packs, we became - well I became quite fond of our ration packs. Used to make up some really good brews. With bully beef and rice and curry and -

33:00 good stuff. Yeah, used to enjoy it. Dog biscuits.

**What are dog biscuits?**

Well very, used to have dog biscuits in the Second World War, a very hard - very hard biscuits that lasted a long time, I suppose. As opposed to our fresh biscuits that go stale.

**Would you dunk them in your coffee and tea?**

Oh yeah, dunk them and

33:30 put them in our curry and the curry'd break them all up, oh yeah.

**It's like a versatile biscuit.**

Yeah.

**Did you get to know any of the nurses around there?**

No. No.

**They wouldn't have been in the province either would they?**

In Phuoc Tuy, the nurses were at, 1 ALSG [Australian Logistics Support Group], at the hospital and

34:00 as the - as just an old baggy arses we were infantry blokes, we never came across any nurses. Invariably they would have been at Nui Dat, now and again. We never saw them, any Australian nurses and the whole tour, I think I only saw two or three, what we used to call, 'round eyed' girls, And they perhaps entertainers, no I think they were all Vietnamese, might have seen

34:30 one or two white Australian girls in the whole tour. On - you know, entertainers I think - I can't remember, I think I remember two or three girls altogether I saw in the 12 months.

**So you got some Australian entertainment over, or some American entertainment?**

Might have been Australian. But I think

35:00 most of our entertainers were locals. Yeah.

**So you didn't get hurt, you didn't go to hospital?**

No.

**Do you think someone was looking after you while you were away?**

Yeah.

**Now, you see this a lot in American movies and just tell me if this question is way out of line, but**

35:30 **going into villages and clearing out the VC, was that part of being an Australian Infanteer?**

I can't say it's part of what we did, 2nd Battalion did. Other Australian units may have done it. We didn't as far as I can recall. I don't recall going into any villages

36:00 and clearing out. We went in and searched some and we were - we weren't welcome.

**You weren't welcome?**

Oh no. We weren't welcome at all. But we just searched and left. But I'm talking about us. Other Australian

36:30 battalions and units may have operated differently and at different times of that war, earlier on, when there was quite a bit of, much more conflict than we saw.

**Part of this was the whole problem of Vietnam of course was the fact that you didn't know in a village who was VC and who wasn't.**

That's right.

- 37:00 Some of the villages were wholly sympathetic to the Vietcong, that's right. And obviously they couldn't see why we were there, what we were doing in the country. Us and the Americans. And you know, what was happening, the
- 37:30 the spraying, you know the defoliation things like that and of course, we had full control of the air, you know, we had 100% air superiority, we could call in air strikes, gun ships, all sorts of things. And poor old VC, you know, they were operating
- 38:00 without any of that. Trying to fight us. And we were their equal I think as a - as soldiers. We were their equal as soldiers without regard of the artillery the air support and all of these other things. And there's no doubt they resented us. And then spraying all of those chemicals onto them.
- 38:30 Yeah.
- So they saw you as more of an intrusion, more of a hindrance than a help.**
- I think so. Yeah.
- I wonder also, if they equated you with the Americans in so far as they're all intruding upon us, not differentiating between Australian, New Zealanders,**
- 39:00 **Americans.**
- Well I guess they would have. I mean we were in their country. We used to drive through the town of Baria on the way to Vung Tau and near Baria was an orphanage that the Australians used to
- 39:30 support. And it's - that tradition is being carried on, because they're doing that in - very recently in Middle East, in Baghdad. Supporting an orphanage, and some Australian veterans of the Vietnam War are still looking after that orphanage in somewhere near Baria. So obviously the
- 40:00 Vietnamese were all not anti us or the Americans, but I think majority were. And couldn't understand what we were doing there.

## Tape 8

- 00:31 **Was your assault pioneer training ever put into use on -**
- No.
- Not at all?**
- No, not at all. Just as well too, because I - it was a dangerous job.
- 01:00 And I think unless you were doing it all the time, field engineers were constantly training and preparing for that so I'm glad I didn't do it.
- What about your experience with defoliants and things that were used over there?**
- I don't think defoliants were sprayed in the years that I was there. I think it was called, 'Operation Ranch Hand,' and I don't think
- 01:30 I think that it - that they had completed that by 1970. So as my own thoughts on it.
- Right, it wasn't that they had maybe thought that it wasn't a great idea, but that the operation itself had been finished.**
- I think so. That's was the aerial spraying defoliants, however around the base of Nui Dat,
- 02:00 it had been reported by a Lieutenant Craig Steel that, that chemical, D445 or whatever it is the Agent Orange chemical, was sprayed around Nui Dat. He reported that, he was a hygiene officer in Nui Dat, but I don't know whether or not the military army has backed him on that.
- 02:30 I think this is what he had stated afterwards.
- Towards the end of your tour, when you were - you did your full 12 months. I've heard of a lot of fellas having calendars of girls, with their days numbered?**
- No. No,
- 03:00 we didn't have that. We did have countdown though, how many days to go and you know, so many days and then it was the last day of the week. Yeah, used to do that.
- So how did the countdown work?**
- Well, I think it was just up to you, I mean you know, 14 days, a wakey, the last day was 'a wakey' and

that was counted down, yeah. I think everyone did that after their tour. Towards the end of their tour, I mean.

**03:30 And were you counting down your days?**

Oh I don't think so. No, towards the end of my tour right towards the end, they were short of a company driver and someone to take over the armoury so in the last couple of weeks I did that job. So I was back at Nui Dat for the last couple of weeks. As opposed to some of the blokes who

**04:00** were pulled out of an operation, given one or two days to get cleaned up then on a plane you're home. So I was very lucky. I spent the last couple of weeks in Nui Dat.

**And you flew back on Qantas?**

No flew back on an American R&R flight, so - into Sydney and the Americans had a -

**04:30** had an R&R centre up the Cross somewhere and we - we were sent up to the Cross to this R&R centre and then Australian Army took over and then we were sent on to our respective bases of discharge and my mate, Nulla Barker,

**05:00** came back - he and I came back on this R&R flight together and Nulla was to be discharged in Adelaide and I was to be discharged in Enoggera. So, yeah that's how it occurred. Yeah. Nulla - we came back in our

**05:30** our polys and our slouch hat, so as we got off the plane or must have been maybe up at the R&R centre in Sydney but Nulla had my hat and I had his. And his was - mine was too small for him and I could wear mine into Enoggera, to go and get discharged, you know, just put - slightly too big for me, but Nulla

**06:00** went to Woodside I think it's called in Adelaide, to be discharged and he made his way into the gate and the sergeant guard at the gate said, "Put your hat on digger." Cos he wasn't dressed, wasn't fully dressed and Nulla, who was a Pommy orphan, he came out from England as an orphan, grew up in Alice Springs and we call him, Nulla. So Nulla

**06:30** said, "No." And the sergeant once again said, "Put your hat on digger." And once again, it was, "No." And the sergeant said, 'Soldier, I'm ordering you to put that hat on.' And the hat was too small, it would just be like a pimple up the top. And Nulla said, "Go and get fucked."

**07:00** To the sergeant which is pretty bad. Could have had him on a charge straight away. Anyway, he was getting out the next day and nothing happened.

**Was it a mistake that you ended up with each other's hats?**

Oh just a mistake and another time when -

**07:30** towards the end of my tour when I was driving, I was ordered to drive from company headquarters, our lines up to battalion headquarters. With the 2 IC of our company, a Captain Hayden. And Captain Hayden was late for his - for this meeting with the commanding officer, Colonel Church.

**08:00** And he said, as soon as he jumped in the Land Rover, he said, "Step on it Blue," he said, "I'm late." And so there was a 15 mile per hour speed limit in Nui Dat because of the dust, dirt and dust. And I'm driving up past company - support company and the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] of support company was a fellow, very nice type of bloke, very

**08:30** well liked bloke by the name of Gibbons, Kiwi Gibbons. And Kiwi Gibbons trained with us in Townsville before we went over, so he was really a charlie company CSM, who had transferred to support company whilst we were over there and support company was a senior position for the CSM. Now, Kiwi Gibbons, was outside the lines of support company when I come charging up going about 30 miles an hour with dust

**09:00** billowing everywhere behind me and this captain sitting beside me. Captain with his full uniform on and me with the shorts and a sidearm and no shirt, nothing that's the way we used to dress, and boots of course. And Kiwi's there and he's watching. He watched me coming and he couldn't do a damn thing about it because I had an officer sitting next to me. So when we got to battalion headquarters Captain Hayden said to me,

**09:30** "You can shoot through back to the lines now Blue and," he said, "Come back and pick me up and such and such a time." I said, "Right Sir." Then I thought, "Oh I'm in for it now." Because I've got to drive past Kiwi Gibbons so I'm just taking it steady as I can, 15 miles an hour and he's standing in the middle of the road, with his hands on his hips and he said, pulled up and he come up to me and

**10:00** he said, "Soldier." He knew me, Blue Reynolds. He said, "Soldier," he said, "What're you up to? Driving up there like that?" And I said, "But Sir, but Sir," starting to try to explain that I was ordered to do this. He said, "Don't you f-in' but Sir' me, I'll have you on a charge." I said, "Oh." Anyway I got out of it but I was "Soldier" then, not Blue, soldier.

- 10:30 "I'll have you on a charge." When I got out of the army, six months later or so maybe a year later, I was having a beer, I walked into the Dalrymple Hotel here in Townsville and might have had the same polyester shirt - not the same polyester shirt - but I had a polyester shirt on and I was working as a mechanic and I had the sleeves cut out. Well as soon as I walked through the door, Kiwi Gibbons was on the other side of the bar, well he
- 11:00 bellowed at me. He bellowed, he said, "Hey Blue!" Wasn't soldier this time, he said, "Hey Blue!" And he abused me for cutting the sleeves out of my shirt, my army shirt and everyone in the bar was looking at me. He knew I was out of course, and he was just having a go at me. But previous to that, he was going to charge me. Well respected fellow.
- 11:30 **Sounds like a good bloke.**
- Yeah, he was.
- What can you tell us of Australia when you came back, the sort of reception that you received and..?**
- Not wanted at the RSL [Returned and Services League]. And I came back and I went back to my old job. Now, I returned to Australia just before the battalion and
- 12:00 the battalion came into Townsville by ship and landing barge into the city. Now - and then they had a march through the city and Freedom of the City. And I requested a day off from where I was working. Now, I hadn't been back long, and I was working as a mechanic and I wasn't allowed to have the day off, being, young and still pretty stupid
- 12:30 naïve, you know, should have had a sickie. But do the right thing, ask for the day off, and wasn't allowed. I was allowed to have an hour off and go and watch the march through the city. So that really didn't make me feel too good. And at the time, the 4th Battalion had replaced us in Vietnam and the
- 13:00 protesters were- they were still going and lots of protests - lots of conflict. We were advised when we came back to Australia to punch a postie because the posties had refused to let our mail go through to Vietnam. The waterside workers were trying
- 13:30 to still stop the Jeparit, which was our supply ship. And these things were happening so it wasn't a very nice environment for us to return to. And for those of us who initial, had initial thoughts of the whole war like - I mean, this was at the end of a two year period, initially
- 14:00 at the start of this period, I really had doubts about what we were going to be put through and why and you know, and after having done the whole thing, the two year experience because that's what was required of us and then coming back to Australia to this conflict and turmoil, really helped me make up my mind
- 14:30 that I didn't want to stay. So what I did was stay home long enough to spend some time with my Dad and then left to get some money. So I went up to Weipa and got some money up there- there's a bit more money up there for a mechanic so, got enough money there then to travel. And I then
- 15:00 once I had enough money, came back to Townsville, got - flew to Port Moresby, got a ship to Singapore and then flew onto London and then stayed away for seven years. But the reason was, that we - there was no welcome mat for us. And there was too many things happening in Australia for this
- 15:30 too much conflict I thought, about us as returned servicemen and what was happening in Vietnam. So I was quite happy to put my head in the sand and live in England and not have to worry about anything that was happening here.
- And how did you feel within yourself, given the doubts that you had to start with before you went into the service, two years later, having done it and coming back? How were you feeling about what you had done?**
- 16:00 In those initial, I think, initially when I returned I was just glad to be out of it and I was - my doubts about what the war was about were still there, however, I had no doubts about the back up that we were not getting so I was all for this punch
- 16:30 a postie and take these protesters on, who were trying to stop supplies and things going through. I mean, all we were doing, was doing what we had to do. Doing a job. So yes, I was really then, my way of thinking was
- 17:00 full of support for the blokes in the army. As opposed to the - our involvement as such in the war. It's hard to explain but yeah, that's it.
- It's a very conflicted state of affairs, isn't it?**
- Yes. Yes. Because the 12 years of active service in Vietnam with all this close bunch of blokes that you were with,
- 17:30 I think most of the army blokes, most of them were conservative in their thinking in that they thought we should have been in that conflict and I think most of them still do think that. But I wasn't that

conservative and I was, as I said, hesitant and unsure about which

18:00 way we should be going with this – on the other hand, this bunch of blokes that we were with you know, we were so close that how could I support people who were trying to stop things going through to those other blokes up there that were still there fighting? You know.

**And to any manner of degree actually**

18:30 **put them in danger because of it.**

Well, yes. Yeah.

**At least make it hard.**

Of course. Yeah. The contact with home was very important, why would they try to stop the letters getting through? All of these sort of things and you know. Yeah.

**Was that something you relied on in Vietnam? Did you write home?**

I did.

19:00 Yeah I wrote home a bit. Quite a bit I think. Yeah.

**Did your dad and brother write back?**

I don't think my Dad would have wrote back much, no. No. Just told them, I think I just generalised, you know, wouldn't have said much in my letters. The weather and things like that.

19:30 **So how long were you in Australia before you got the money together to bugger off to England?**

Came back in June 1971 and 1972, two years. Two years, get enough to head off.

**And in that time were you having any**

20:00 **not scuffles – but did you have any direct conflict with protester or anything like that?**

No. No. The protests were in the major cities and I was working away from there.

**Were you telling anybody that you had been to Vietnam?**

Oh no. Never used to talk about that. Never, noone ever knew. No,

20:30 in fact, one of the fellows that used to drink at the, at our local Saturday pub, he was one of the disappeared fellows, that had disappeared from the pub when I was – before I went into the army. This was a bloke disappeared, didn't know where he'd gone. And he went over to Vietnam and he was in the 6th Battalion and when I went up to Weipa

21:00 he was the paymaster. He'd been to Vietnam and returned, he was the paymaster in Weipa. I wasn't aware of that. But I used to drink with him at Lang's three or four years previously, so we'd both been to Vietnam. He didn't know I'd been to Vietnam either. No one ever talked about and it was only within the last month that I have run across this fellow and he is also a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated].

21:30 And when I was made aware of where he was, I contacted him and I said, "I remember you from Comalco [mining company] at Weipa." And he said, "That's right, I was up there." I said, "I didn't know that you were in the 6th Battalion." He said, "No." He said the same thing to me, he wasn't aware that I'd been in the army. So

22:00 never used to talk about it.

**Extraordinary.**

It is, isn't it? It is. It is.

**Given what you'd experienced, did you lean on anything for support after your war experience even though you were away from Australia?**

No. Oh, no. Excessive alcohol consumption for a long time.

22:30 Ten years.

**What would you class as excessive?**

Oh, quite a lot. Quite a lot. Although the environment that I was in lended itself to that. There was another veteran working with me in Europe, driving tour coaches, and he was

23:00 he had a bit of a reputation as a moody cranky bastard. And I guess I had a similar reputation. And we have discussed this over, he lives in Airlie Beach and he's also a TPI pensioner and we have discussed

this and both agreed that our mood swings and our grumpiness

23:30 we both think was a result of the conflict we'd been through.

**And would there be anything particular that would set off the mood swings? Or that would get you cranky more than anything else?**

Don't think so. I guess

24:00 as opposed to the other fellows that we used to work with, the other dozen or so, or maybe more than that, a couple of dozen, twenty odd drivers and couriers, we would probably stand out as the two blokes who everything had to be shipshape. I mean, it was the military training coming out and we were doing camping

24:30 tours and hotel tours for young Australians and they were out for a good time. Whereas me mate and I were trying to - bringing the military aspect in. You do it this way or that way. So I guess that had something to do with being a grumpy bugger and moody or things weren't happening the way I wanted them to do, to be and I don't know.

**(UNCLEAR) a bunch of new recruits.**

Well that's right.

25:00 Yeah. But I think it was the military training.

**So was it a good place to escape to in that sense?**

Oh absolutely. We didn't have any responsibilities any politics to worry about anything that was happening in Australia, we didn't have things to worry about that. You know, that's good, yeah.

**You mentioned this morning though, that you ended**

25:30 **up having a breakdown many years later.**

Many years later.

**Can you talk us through what happened and - in terms of it relating to your war experience?**

Well, it obviously had something to do with that. Yeah. The

26:00 getting back to the times in Europe when we travelled through those communist countries, there were - I believe quite a lot of Russian soldiers in East Germany and Poland and Czechoslovakia and

26:30 a number of military installations that we used to go past and check points to go through. And I was always on edge, extremely on edge around these various installations. That was - that's the serious side of what was happening over there to me. I mean, I was finding it hard to cope when we had to be around, drive through these areas.

27:00 Years later, and that stayed with me and some things that I saw, for instance, horse drawn drays with large - full of hay, they would, the guards would get a very long sharp and metal spike, there were two spikes actually with a big handle and they would stab it

27:30 into the middle of this dray to pierce any bodies and it would go right through any body if there was persons hiding underneath, you know? Trying to escape. And that stayed with me. Now, those images and the feelings that I had, a few years after Vietnam, seeing all this happening in Europe, in Eastern Europe and then

28:00 later on, what happened to me out west was that I had been in my bag I had a book, written by my OC, Major Peterson and his own story and one particular night I read the whole book right through from beginning to end. Now, I'd been carrying that round for two years and not been able

28:30 to read it and I wanted to read it. And I carried it and I read the whole lot. Now, a very short time after that, what was happening to me was that I was not being able to, I couldn't - well it was diagnosed as acute depression. But I just couldn't cope, my whole body appeared to close down and weeping and I needed to get

29:00 into a closed room at three o'clock in the afternoon and I'd stay there until - in the dark until - no dinner and no breakfast - until time for work the next day and go to work and then I was crying at work and - so when I went and saw the nurse out there, on the mine site, she realised that I had mental problem of some sort. And my doctor diagnosed acute depression, when and he said, "Just take a

29:30 few weeks off work and you'll be right." And two weeks later I wasn't right at all. But I went back to my doctor and he said, "Well it's time for you to go to work." And in the interim he had submitted a claim to worker's comp, as it was called then, Queensland worker's comp. And worker's comp wrote back and said, "No it's not a work related illness," that I had.

30:00 So I was furious. Whatever I had wasn't being recognised. And I thought it was probably overwork or

depression or – depression from overwork or something like that, now, someone urged me to make a claim to Veterans Affairs and see if it was something else apart from work.

- 30:30 Now, the result of reading this, I think of reading this book brought back many of the memories that I'd kept hidden, kept down anyway, I was required then to – Veterans Affairs got me to see consulting psychiatrist and the psychiatrist
- 31:00 asked many probing questions and as a result of a couple of visits to that psychiatrist I ended up a horrible wreck in his offices and that and – but he wrote a report. Now, Veterans Affairs accepted immediately that I had a war caused stress related injury.
- 31:30 My – and went to – I got a 100%, zero to 100%. I kept on working because of my – the age of my children but I was being urged by my GP [general practitioner] to stop work. And I thought, that's well and good for you to say, stop work, we're about the same age. I kept on thinking, well I can't stop work because
- 32:00 I have to provide for my children for the future. And I was going through a very bad time and I was hardly coping with work and a subsequent incident a domestic incident occurred and I had to
- 32:30 go to a court, magistrates court, over this incident. Once this occurred and I saw the GP [General Practitioner] immediately, he said to me, what has occurred was a result of me not taking his advice and stopping work and
- 33:00 he immediately put in motion for me to cease work. And applied to Veterans Affairs and got the full pension. I ceased work. But the consequence of this was that
- 33:30 the marriage failed. That's about it. But fortunately, in the five years since then, I've been seeing the same psychiatrist every – well, at the moment it's every month. And with medication I'm coping quite well and
- 34:00 the domestic scene is very good. So. There's good and bad about it all. However, I'm only one of many veterans that have suffered and still are. And as you said before, I think it's a condition that has occurred – has been
- 34:30 there for all of the wars and this condition, I think they were shot in the First World War for this mental condition, my Dad had it, I have no doubt. And so, you know, that's a result of my time in Vietnam.

#### **How do you think**

- 35:00 **Australia fared across the years in terms of – did you come to terms with Australia?**

Oh yeah. Since 1987, when the homecoming was in Sydney. Now,

- 35:30 I went to Sydney we were – we managed to – Bob Hawke was Prime Minister at the time and the veteran community in Townsville managed to get one of the 707s, these planes to fly us down. So we got a flight to Sydney and a Hercules back. But the, that was the start of
- 36:00 I believe of Australia coming to recognise the war veterans of Vietnam. And what really struck me about that march in Sydney was that the – in 1987 there were many World War II veterans lining that route,
- 36:30 that route with their medals on. So, that affected us a lot I think, seeing these, our – the earlier generation. Lining the thoroughfare in Sydney.

#### **Do you think in some ways, that was more important**

- 37:00 **than – being recognised by other diggers more so than the government?**

It was absolutely more – yes, very, very important that the people of Australia recognised us for what we'd done,

- 37:30 as opposed to the government. Well some of say DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] is the enemy. And our – and the government is still our enemy, some of us think that. We're always seen to be fighting them.

#### **Did you walk back into any RSL clubs since that time? Since you left Australia?**

- 38:00 Yes. I have been a member of this local club for ten years. Although I never use it. And it's not really like an RSL club it's more like a casino here in Townsville now and of the opinion that if they could get rid of all the old
- 38:30 blokes out of the diggers bar and throw all the memorabilia in the bin and fill it up with poker machines that's what they would like to do. That's what I believe.

#### **I don't think you're alone there either. Given what you'd been through and how you got into Vietnam in the first place, what do you think of National Service now?**

National Service?

- 39:00 I think that National Service for our young blokes, would be a good thing, I don't think National Service for our young blokes to be sent overseas is a good thing. But the discipline that the army
- 39:30 instils in young people stays with them. And can only be good but I'm not of the opinion that we should have National Service for overseas conflicts. Maybe trained
- 40:00 to defend Australia. And six months only and everyone, not just balloted people. But I don't think that will ever happen.
- 40:30 End of tape