

Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Donkin (Don) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Right Don if we could just start with you giving us a very brief summary of your entire life up unto this point?**

Alright I was born in Marrickville, my father was a fireman which is really a stoker in a steam engine, and he was in the railways and trained to be a train driver but at that stage of the

01:00 game there were four boys and a girl and in the early Thirties the Depression came and he had been with the railways five or six years. And it was first on first off, so he got a sack with about one thousand others. And what sort of saved him was my grandfather, an ex World War I veteran and worked with the Water Board as a timekeeper. And in Manly they were doing a thing called relief work, it was two weeks on and two weeks off digging the ditches for the Manly sewers. So my grandfather got my father work every

01:30 second fortnight. So we moved to Manly, which the family has never regretted of course. And he worked there with them for a while. And then the war started and he went back to work as a machinist which he new something about in Sydney in Petersham. And we lived on in Manly just down near the Manly pool for some years. And then we moved into a very big house up on the side of the oval over looking the Queenscliff lagoon. Where they stayed for many many years. I and my brothers

02:00 and sister went to the Harbord Catholic school. And then I went on then to Christian Brothers and I stayed at school, I was there until the Christmas just before I would have turned, my birthday is in January and I would have turned 13 in the January and it was end of December, there was a bit of a hiatus in the classroom and one of the boys got beaten up so badly by the teacher that he collapsed. And I thought about this over Christmas and

02:30 decided that I would not go back to school. The war was on manpower was in force. And if you were under fifteen you didn't have to register for the manpower for a job. And there was a job going at the Hotel Pacific as a night clerk. So at 13 years of age I rolled up and they gave me the job from 11 at night till 7 in the morning. Six days a week, you got Wednesdays off. And I did that during the war. Interesting job, at one stage of the game I had a floor reserve for American air crews about four or five to a room

03:00 and half a floor reserved for American nurses. So one's education was not lacking in some aspects of life. I stayed there and joined a surf club, road surfboats. The war finished, I was looking for something else to do, but just prior to that I was we found in those days if you couldn't dance you didn't get to take girls home. So we were go to the school of Manly Ballroom Dancing and I was going there one night

03:30 and at 7.30 walking up the stairs in front of me was a fellow I knew from football and in front of him was his sister. And I just met the love of my life Moira my wife. She was 16, I would have been 17 I guess so we went out together for a while. And I wanted to join the army and I guess it was because the surf club influenced me a bit. All these guys had come back from the war and they had this camaraderie

04:00 it was hard to, for a young man it was hard to fathom. But I wanted a part of it. So I went in and put my name down for the army and navy. And in due course up come the army in June. We had been to Queensland the first national titles were held in New South Wales and we came back and I was called up and I went into the army, to Greta just outside, just near Singleton. And they were quite a big recruit camp. And I did my recruit training and after about three weeks

04:30 I got a call up for the navy. And I could have taken it. It was part of the senior service but I rejected it and stayed with the army which, which I've never regretted. Served on, I was posted to Victoria Barracks into the guard's platoon, which was absolutely dreadful. It was 24 on 24 off forever. And it was just after Christmas 1947 and a young officer there and grabbed me one day and said, "Are you are regular army soldier." which I was, I joined the regular army a few weeks before.

05:00 The first thing you joined in those days was the interim army, it was two years and then the regular army come up in 1947. He said, "I am looking for people for Japan." so in February 1948 I sailed for

Japan on the Old [HMAS] Kanimbla with 500 others. I arrived there, had a choice of allocation either to (UNCLEAR) or A4 Battery and having lived in Manly all my life I thought north head guns artillery, got to go for A4 Battery and did. And joined the battery

- 05:30 out at one of the outer suburbs of Kure. A place called Hiro. And life for a soldier changed dramatically we were sort of, you couldn't get anything and it was old and grotty. And you got to Japan and the first thing you did was go into the tailor shop and where he took your uniform and remodelled them made them fit, gave you shoes. So life was very good. The dining room, four to a table, a waitress to every two tables. Lots of sport, played Aussie Rules, soccer, rugby union, cricket, basket ball,
- 06:00 anything you could think, we were a small unit and you were in every team and we were there. I used to communicate with Moira, we were still very young people. And then in December they decided to bring the brigade home from Japan and only leave one battalion there, which turned out to be 3 battalion. So home we came and A4 Battery went to North Head. (UNCLEAR) which I could have picked went to Puckapunyal. You can imagine my relief for joy there. Back home reunited with Moira.
- 06:30 And I guess I was being a young soldier and a young surf club again and Moira said, "I'll see you later." and we, we parted for some months. I went off to do a driving school and at Ingleburn which went for three months. Came back and then I got the, I was ordered a mess orderly at North Head one Friday night. I was told to report to Mr Bill at 8 o'clock with my gear. I would be gone for at least a month. And I was on a truck and out to Casula. And the Saturday morning,
- 07:00 it was a Friday, Saturday morning I started my three days course, I was bulldozer driving and then I went to Marrangaroo near Lithgow to work on the open mines to break the Mono strike in July August 1949 under a labour government. And we managed Marrangaroo or Lithgow in July August it was snowing there was frost, we were living in tents. And we used to work from 6.30 in the morning to 6 at night every day
- 07:30 getting the coal out. And that year we finished and we came home. And I met Moira at a dance, down at the Mam it was called the Memorial Hall at Manly a week or so later and we started going together again, and a little while later we were engaged. And I served on then with the battery doing courses, there had been no promotion up until 1940, all promotion in the army had stopped. And it started again in 1949 and I did a NCO's [Non-Commissioned Officer] course and become a bombardier. Then we were
- 08:00 married in March, St Patrick's Day. At Manly, St Matthew's church in 1951 and I, in 1952 I was sent to Kapooka for 8 months, recruit training. Came back and I was a sergeant, technical assistant royal artillery. Worked out predicting a shot and stuff in command post. And I did that until 1953. And the thing called call conversion
- 08:30 was on. We were running out of soldiers for Korea, infantry soldiers so anybody and everybody was going and you'd be pulled out of your unit. I'd be pulled out to go and become a mortar sergeant and I arrived out at Ingleburn at 4 battalion for training and the OC [Officer Commanding] for the C company out there at the time had been my boss in Pucka and instead of me going to support company, I went to the infantry company. Consequently when I arrived in Korea I was an infantry platoon sergeant, not a mortar platoon sergeant. The difference there is the mortar platoon
- 09:00 rides in jeeps and the infantry platoon walk. As I left Moira was, Moira was 11 weeks pregnant at that stage, 11 weeks before Chris would arrive. So off to Korea, did my 12, did my 12 months there come back, had a hell of a job getting out of Japan because I was going to go to Areb (?) the regimental holding unit and I had the holding platoon and finally I jumped up and down and waved my arms bitterly and they said, "You can go home now." and I arrived on the long weekend.
- 09:30 Two weeks before Chris' first birthday, which was fairly dramatic. It would be fairly dramatic now, but it was fairly dramatic in those days. Anyhow we over come that. And Moira had to move back to where, we were living in Harbord back to the house in Adam Street, where we are now. It was her mother's house and her mother became very ill so Moira moved home to mind her. So when I came home from Korea I came home to Adam Street. And a year later we bought the house. And as the family grew so did the
- 10:00 house. Served back onto A Battery. And served on, served on with them. And then in 1957 I was posted to the school of artillery as an instructor. Stayed there for three years and it was great. Drive to work early from home in the morning or get the bus or Moira would run me up, really good. And then in 1960 I was sent back to Holsworthy to 102 Battery as a warrant officer.
- 10:30 Served with them until 1963. And I was doing a PD (?) course. I was a bit of a jock strap, played rugby union for the army, played basketball for the army, swam for the army. And I, they were doing PD courses, in actual fact I was a bit old to be doing the PD course I was taking on but I was doing them. I was on a PD course and I was told, I was at North Head and I was told to report down to the TOC, technical commander. And I went down there and he had a little bit of paper and it just said, 'WO [Warrant Officer] Don in Vietnam in October'. That was all that was on it. So
- 11:00 I rang up the regiment and got onto the adjutant who I knew and he said, "Hey that is about all we know that you are going to Vietnam in October, but you are going to do some things before you go." So I finished the PD course, reported back to the regiment. I was only there for a couple of days and I was on my way to Canungra for the second time, I had already been to Canungra once with the A4 Battery.

Did the course up there for advisors, which was not a lot of fun. Came back out of there on the, on the Thursday, got into Sydney

- 11:30 on the Friday, was home Friday night. And Moira put me on the train for Melbourne on the Saturday night. So I was home for one night. And went down to a place called Queenscliff to Swan Island. Now this is back thirty years, I have to kill you for having told you that, but now I don't have to. Where I did a four weeks course on how to sabotage and do all sorts of terrible things to people. Came back and I was due to leave in October as I said. And Suddenly Sergeant Bill
- 12:00 Hacking was killed in Vietnam. So I received an order, I would take, I was posted to Vietnam as of July via Sergeant Hacking. I thought they could have left that in the remarks column but anyhow they didn't. So I duly left for Vietnam on the 1st day of July. Arrived in Saigon and went to a place called Hiep Khanh which is north of Hue a couple of kilometres just off the main highway. The Street Without Joy as it is called. Stayed there for a couple
- 12:30 of months and then I was posted. Not actually posted, detached to Hiep Khanh, to Khe Sanh where there was a half team of Special Forces. And they were being run by a group of people called the CSG the Combined Studies Group which you know they were all civilians wearing floral shirts and pearl handled pistols which was a bit frightening. And I stayed on up there until just on Christmas. When I returned during that time President Kennedy was assassinated. President Diem was assassinated so it was a
- 13:00 fairly traumatic month in Khe Sanh. Came back to Hiep Khanh. Hiep Khanh closed and all the people there were allocated, well most of them were allocated to Special Forces and we all went back and I went back to Khe Sanh to a full team. And I stayed there until July. And because Special Forces teams only do six months I in actual fact had three different teams in my period of time there. The second team, the team I went back to in January
- 13:30 was commanded by Captain Floyd Thompson. And on Good Friday 1964 in a little two seater plane he was shot down, the pilot was killed and he was captured. And he became the longest serving POW [Prisoner of War] the Americans ever had, about 9 years and two months. I've got a clipping; he only died last year as a matter of fact. He lived at Key West. Finished my time in the Training Team, came back to Australia,
- 14:00 back to Moira, back to our four children. Had a bit of leave, went back to North Head, posted back to North Head which was really really good and I took over as battery sergeant major of the regimental training wing, which was a very nice job because you only had a couple hundred people come through the training wing in a year. And that changed of course six months later when national service came in we had 2,000 people come through the wing in a year. So it went from very nice job to a job you got up very early and come home very late from. I served
- 14:30 on there on that until 1968 when they said, "You will now go to 4 Field Regiment." back to Vietnam as the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of 4 Field. And I was packed up actually my suitcases were packed up in the lounge room; Moira was up doing her canteen duty at Harbord school. And I just went up to North Head I think to do some publications from memory. And the runner grabbed me and said, "You must see the commanding officer straight after morning tea." I went down to see the commanding officer, Colonel Seamen and he said, "Is there any reason if you had to go to Townsville
- 15:00 tonight would that upset anything, any plans." No it wouldn't for me I didn't want to go till after Christmas anyhow, this was, this was November. He said, "Well alright you've got to march out with 7 Battalion tomorrow, you are going to France to Paris for Armistice Day." So I duly packed up and left with the Australian contingent, went to Paris for ten days as a guest of the French Army. Carried the flag on the parade down the Champs Elysees, [General] De Gaulle took the salute. Absolutely tremendous experience. Came back from that and then went to Townsville,
- 15:30 which was a bit of a let down. Moved the family to Townsville at Christmas, which they were really excited about Townsville. Townsville now is quite a pretty city. In 1969 it was not a pretty city. Stayed there with the regiment and reformed, retrained and half the soldiers in the regiment were national servicemen, probably the best soldiers I have ever served with and away we went to Vietnam again. From March 71, from March 70 to March 71.
- 16:00 Came home from there, Moira back to Adam Street with the kids and I was posted to Victoria Barracks as the RSM. Now Victoria Barracks was the headquarters what was called Eastern Command. And without being disrespectful most of the people there are either too old to go to Vietnam or too sick to go to Vietnam or could find some reason why they didn't want to go to Vietnam. And I have arrived back and I am the platoon sergeant from out of 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] and I am the [(UNCLEAR)] company commander, I am
- 16:30 the RSM of 4 Field Regiment in active service and now I'm, now I am the RSM of Victoria Barracks. An enormous culture shock for a start, for me and for them. And I did two years there and it turned out to be quite a good two years. And in August 73 I was told I was being posted as RSM at the School of Artillery. And I came to the School of Artillery and I stayed there forever. I was there for five years. Absolute tremendous time. And after five years I thought this is enough of this. So the director of artillery who had

- 17:00 then been our 2IC [Second in Command] in Vietnam and he come up to see me. I should move, so I moved back to Victoria Barracks into a staff captain's job, not as a captain but as an away one. And I did that for two years. Turned 50 midlife crisis, should leave the army. The army was going through one of those very peace time periods where people are trying to think of different names to call different things. So I left the army and I applied for a job as the service member on a repatriation board, and I got it.
- 17:30 So I then went to work as a civilian behind a desk where I did files and made decisions all day and really didn't get to talk to anybody and absolutely hated it. But I did that for about seven years and the job changed. And one of the things that probably drove me out of the army, well it didn't drive me out of the army, decided me to leave the army, was that Don Quinn who was the director of artillery come up twice, the second time he come up he said, "You've got to be in Canberra in February." and that would have been in 1981
- 18:00 "And you are going to take over as the ceremonial major of the army." And I didn't want to go to Canberra I had avoided it for 33 years. And I said to Moira, "They are going to send me to Canberra." She said, "That is alright, we'll buy another car you can drive up weekends." because she definitely wasn't going to Canberra and the kids didn't want to leave the beach. So I thought it was a good time to move. So I took the job in York Street. And it is a great building now; it is a magnificent hotel at this stage. But it was a pretty grotty old office block in those days. And I stayed there and after
- 18:30 seven years they wanted to change the system of determination and I spent the last year as a service advisor, advising people on service conditions, doctors and so forth. And I would move to, I would move to Canberra where there would be a bigger job and I would have a helper who would do archive or research for me I think. And I thought, no I don't want to do this either. So I left the Veterans' Affairs and took a job, I had only been out of work about two weeks and a fellow I knew from the army, he had been my last boss,
- 19:00 he rang me and he said, "I believe you are out of work." I said, "Well yes really." Moira and I had just driven to Perth and back for a surf carnival, the championships. He said, "Come and work for me I will put you on a two weeks contract." So I went to the Premier's office in New South Wales in the protocol department and did 87, 88, 89 and you can imagine what 88 was like, it was absolutely tremendous. I met everybody that was anybody in the world, I don't mean in New South Wales. And it came 80, 89 I was 60, and
- 19:30 I stopped working full time, I used to go back and work part time for them and I think it was 18 months later I was 61 and a bit or something, I was going one morning to do two weeks for them on a contract, it was rainy, it was nasty. I thought, "Why am I doing this, this is ridiculous." And that was the day I retired from the workforce forever. Came home to Moira, we sat around looking at each other for a while. I said, "Why don't we go and see the world". So we did, we took off for ten weeks, nearly twelve weeks rather
- 20:00 England, Europe whatever. And we came back and we took off again and we managed to get away four or five times, six times since then. The last couple of years have been fairly quiet, we are getting older. We have got a twenty year old grandson in London, probably starving as we speak, we have got a seven year old that just went off to school yesterday, so there are nine grandkids, all live fairly close, all use the pool and scream and yell. We see a lot of our family.
- 20:30 And we are a pretty content couple. We are about to take off for two weeks on a trip on the Ghan from Adelaide to Darwin. And after that we will do what we do every year, we will go and have eight days on the Gold Coast and watch the surf championships. I don't compete anymore, I competed in the masters up to a couple of years ago and Moira said if I kept competing and nearly drowning she wouldn't go anymore. So I don't compete anymore we still go and that is about it.

Fantastic Don. That is a very

- 21:00 **thorough and very good summary. Well what we will do now is go back to the beginning and get a bit more detail about your childhood. So how old were you when you moved from Marrickville to Manly?**

I think I was about, I think I was about six or eight months. And my brother Noel who is just a year older than me he was quite sick and I, and what I can gather I had diphtheria and

- 21:30 were quite ill and my grandmother took me to look after me and that extended to, to some months, many months. And when they moved to Manly my grandparents lived, I lived with my grandparents in one street and my mother and father lived with the family in the street, the houses were almost back to back. And come the due day my grandmother packed me up and took me round, took me round to my mother and father and, late that afternoon I went blue with my mother carried me back again and said, "Keep him because he will not stop screaming". So I was
- 22:00 brought up by my grandparents. Never more than sort of ten or fifteen minute walk from mother and father, but I can't, I can't ever remember living at home in my mother and father's house. Which was, and I used my grandparents name for many years when I was working at the Pacific Hotel. It wasn't until I joined the army, oh I joined the surf club I used my proper name. That was a bit odd. I guess if I had of been at home with my parents, maybe they wouldn't have let me go to work at thirteen or just thirteen.

22:30 I think it was thirteen and a few days I decided to join the work force and leave Christian Brothers forever.

So your parents were happy to leave the main task of parenting to your grandparents?

I think it was the circumstances of the day. I had a brother and sister who had died at an early age, one died of tetanus, Peter died of tetanus he was about 3three But yeah

23:00 I suppose because it was so close, I used to go up there weekends, most weekends, one of the brothers would come down, we would be at school together.

So who were the brothers and sisters with mum and dad? Because you were the only child that was with the grandparents.

Yes. Eldest brother Ken, he was in the air force during the war. And then there was Joan and Joan worked in Sydney, worked in factories and things and then she went into retail and was with Grace Bros and Horden Brothers [department stores] and then eventually Djs [David Jones].

23:30 And she used to run the book section at the Brooky [Brookvale] Mall, she died, she only died a few months ago. Noel was a plumber, did his trade training. Gordon was, Gordon was a year younger than me and went to uni for a couple of years. Went to uni late, worked for the PMG [Post Master General] as a technician and sort of did very well at it. So they sent him off to uni, he did it for a couple of years and he met and fell in love and decided to give uni [university] away and gave it a miss and went back to the PMG for a while and then other things and he died a couple of years ago.

24:00 But no we've always, we've always seen each other you know, we still ring each other every day. But it didn't it really didn't make much difference except I lived with my grandparents.

So you, you were still very much involved with your brothers and sisters even though?

In the surf club, they were in the surf club I was in the surf club. We used to, the only difference I suppose it used to shock people in those days. I called my mother Madge and my father Gordon, and that used to rock people a bit that I didn't call them

24:30 Mum and Dad.

And what did you call your grandparents?

Nan and Pop.

So what was Manly like back in those early days?

Great place for a great guy to live, or for a great girl to live. It was quiet you knew everybody. Moira lived in Harbord, I mean she could, five minutes walk from Harbord School since the day she was born. And Harbord was a small village, I mean they knew everybody. But I knew a lot of people in

25:00 Manly. My father, my grandfather worked for the council for many years. And I was well known in the area. He was a member of the original RSL [Returned and Services League] club in New South Wales the Manly Memorial Hall, he was a Gallipoli veteran. But it was a great place. And of course being involved with the beach and surfing. I am not too sure when I learnt to swim, I just could. Manly pool had the big promenade, pontoons and if you couldn't swim

25:30 over to the pontoon you couldn't push anybody off, so you learnt to swim very early. And I just can't remember when I did, but I seem to always be able to swim and surf.

Can you tell us a bit about what your grandfather was like as a man?

Very big tall man, very straight forward, very to the point, very old world, don't be, don't be seen talking to fools or people will think you are one. Was one of the expressions that I remember, but he had a lot of

26:00 those. He and my grandmother in the early days in the 20s had been country chefs or cooks in those days and they were quite well known. He was a very good cook and so was my grandmother. Roast pork dinner every Sunday at noon, come whatever the temperature. And we stayed in Manly for really Manly for years and years. And they bought the hamburger shop at Dee Why. We moved to Dee Why. And actually I was in Dee Why, lived in Dee Why

26:30 from the time I was about fifteen, 14 I guess 14 or 15. And Dee Why was a nice place, quiet we were there part of the war, barbwire on the beaches and the artillery regiment from French's Forest came down before dawn every day and take up a replacement. But had Manly beach completely barb wired and had a couple of openings where you could get into the surf. Machine gun placements on various headlands and things. And of course when I became a soldier I knew

27:00 more about it. I thought to myself, why did they barb wire the bloody beach, nobody is going to land there. But it made everybody feel good.

Did your grandfather talk to you much about his war experience?

Not a great deal, no he used to tell some funny stories, but apart from that not much at all. He was

wounded in Gallipoli and came out to the island of, I can't remember, the Greek island where the hospital was and he was there a couple of months and went back into

27:30 Gallipoli. And the second time he came out was with sickness, dysentery or something. And he was quite ill. And after that he went back, he was in the lighthorse. And he enlisted in Ayr in Queensland. He and a group of guys had been drove a herd of cattle down to Ayre. And in those days they swam the cattle out to the ship and they put a sling around and hoched them aboard. And they just got rid of their one hundred odd head of cattle onto this boat and they were in the pub having a beer. And the

28:00 sergeant of police come in and said, "Any of you guys want to go to Germany?" and he enlisted them all in the 4th lighthorse, Queensland zone. And away they went. And the 4th is known as the Queenslanders lighthorse regiment. And away they went to the desert.

Was he your mum or your dad's father?

My grandmother was my mother's mother.

And what sort of a lady was she?

My grandmother,

28:30 much like my grandfather very old world. No swearing stand up straight, keep your mouth shut, speak when you are spoken too. Make sure you got a handkerchief when you go out. And if you could follow those rules you never had any problems. Do as you are told and eat everything that was cooked for you, which was always enormous and very well cooked. No they, they, they weren't strict, they just liked things to be neat, to be tidy and to be done.

Did you take those values onboard

29:00 **do you think?**

I think so yeah, yeah. And being a soldier I cannot tolerate people that don't turn up on time. They say look we'll only be about ten minutes late.

I think we were only about 3 minutes late?

Yeah I noted that. No I will be going somewhere, I will be going to pick up one of the kids. I went and picked up Zac the other morning, we went out and played golf at 6 o'clock in the morning. I said, "I will pick you up at 5.45" I pulled up in front of their house and he was standing out the front waiting for me. Because his mother would have told him, pop will be here

29:30 on time make sure you are there.

And you tell us a bit about the, about your parents, what sort of a bloke was your dad?

Hard working, very hard working. After the war he left, he had this job over in Petersham and after the war people got on him and said, "You should give this away, there must be." it was a very difficult job, very hot, in a foundry, you can imagine what a foundry in 1946 was like. And

30:00 finally one of the guys in the surf club persuaded him to go and work for the PMG, telstra. So he went round to pioneer and he got a job straight away with them. And he was only there a little while and then he was put in charge of a small group. The day he retired. They didn't call them gangers or manage they called them party leaders, god knows why. And he had a group of 60 odd that worked for him and he, his going away present from them was a long handed shovel that had been chromed and polished

30:30 and engraved. And I thought that how fitting, it was his shovel, but he was a very hard workingman. That couldn't tolerate people that couldn't put in a fair days work.

Were you close to dad?

Not really no because of the circumstances. I was close to him because of the surf club. I was close to him because I used to play golf at the social club at the Harbord Diggers and I used to take him with me Sunday morning, not every Sunday morning but most. When I would go I would go and pick him up. I would see him on average

31:00 of every week I guess, more or less. But we weren't, we weren't really close, not as close as my brothers were.

And what was, what was mum like?

Very good cook, actually we used to go up there, Moira and I used to pack up the kids, no car in those days, we lived here we used to walk up Sunday afternoon about 4 o'clock. Not every Sunday and we had dinner. Madge would have cooked normally a roast dinner and she would do cream cakes

31:30 and all this sort of thing that the kids loved. But I suppose we would go there for dinner on a Sunday night at least twice a month if I was home, if I was home. And sometimes Moira would go up there if I wasn't. So yeah she used to see the kids, at least, at least one a week. Moira's Mum who was here when we bought the house had become very ill and she was Moira's father was gone when she was a little tiny girl. Hadn't died

32:00 he had just gone and Marge raised three sons and a daughter on her own by working, cleaning, washing, and she was a school teacher by trade from Victoria and couldn't get a job in New South Wales as a teacher because that was un qualification which seemed ridiculous. But she was very hard working and when she started to get ill Moira came home to look after her. And Moira looked after her for many many years. And finally the doctor used to come and see her said, "I'll have to put her in Concord." And she died in

32:30 Concord Hospital. So Moira had a pretty hard life, she had me away, four kids and her Mum. But that was pretty hard for her, and that went on for about six years.

Of your mum and your dad and grandmother and grandfather, who do you think you were closer to?

Oh I guess, I suppose

33:00 my, friend wise probably my father, maternal wise probably my grandmother.

And how tough was the Depression for the family?

My father, my grandfather didn't have a problem, he had a problem other people had, he always had work, he was that sort of people, person. My father did everything and anything. He'd, he'd

33:30 in between the two week's off with the Water Board and then he'd have two weeks off, he'd go and caddy on Manly golf course. He'd carry two golf bags for two shillings each to make four bob in four and a half hours, but he'd do it, he would do everything and anything. The family never went hungry, the family always had a roof over their head, the boys always wore shoes to school. But he was a battler, he really battled. You couldn't never, he was always a worker, he could always get a

34:00 job because he would work.

Your first school was which one?

The catholic school at Harbord.

What was that like?

Oh alright, I don't remember anything spectacular about it. The nuns were, the nuns were nice, they were kind people, they treated everyone fairly well. I wasn't a bright student I don't think, I think I compared to others I don't think I tried all that hard, that was my problem. And when

34:30 we moved from there to Christian brothers I think what I felt mostly during all day and every day was fear. I was a fairly timid, thin, sickly looking fellow people keep telling me as a young man. But I guess that came from, I am sure it is diphtheria what I had earlier on and I nearly died with it. And with my grandmother I was going to, going to school there and I got ill. And I can remember the scene, we had a big house on the ocean beach, where the Trident is now next to the

35:00 Pacific Hotel. And I can remember waking up one day and finding two nuns kneeling beside me praying and I must have been about six or seven I guess. I can't, I can't remember what was the matter, but I had been in bed forever it seemed. So I eventually overcome all of that.

Was the family religious?

Yeah I had to go to communion. I don't, we didn't go to church every Sunday.

35:30 I don't think my father ever went to church on a Sunday, he wasn't catholic, my mother was catholic. But we had to, all the things you had to do to go to catholic, we did. I don't think mother, mother went to things she had to go to I think. My grandmother and grandfather only went to church when something was happening and they had to be there. And I was probably the only catholic married at St Mary's church at Manly on St Patrick's Day.

36:00 Which was different.

Did you take much of an interest in religion when you were growing up?

No no I don't think so. You went to Christian Brothers you were definitely frightened if you'd die one of the brothers would be there.

Sounds like the beach was always a big part of your life?

Very much so.

From a very young age?

Yeah hence my skin today.

36:30 **So?**

When you have a job where you work from 11 at night to 7 in the morning guess what you did after you knocked off work at 7 in summer?

Straight down?

Yeah you got very tired at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

How far back does involvement in the surf club go for the family?

I think my father joined there, they were very short of people to do the patrols and he was, he was doing this job in the city which entailed him going to work at 6 in the morning and getting home at 8 at night. Working long shifts,

- 37:00 war time and someone, someone he knew on the ferry said, "They are really short of people to do patrols." and he went down to the surf club I think in 1942, 41, that is right, and I joined in 43. And Ken my eldest brother joined before that, before he went away in the air force and Noel.

And which club was that?

Queenscliff.

So when you were a younger lad, what sort of, what sort of things would you do with your recreation time?

- 37:30 Play rugby, play rugby league. In summertime surf club, all day every day, rode surfboats, could swim, wasn't a bad swimmer, but really liked surfboats and road the surfboats and then start sweeping them later on. I like playing rugby league but they were the main sports. Winter time rugby league and summer time. Later on when I got into the
- 38:00 army I got into basketball. Really liked basketball and I became fairly good at it. And played rugby union for the army. As a matter of fact I prefer rugby union to rugby league

Did you have a circle of friends who sort of lived in the Manly neighbourhood that you played with in the street?

Oh when we lived in, when I was a little kid, and we lived in my grandparents lived in Central Avenue which now it is a very ugly building there were about five or six families

- 38:30 and Short Street was the street behind. You got very little traffic, not much traffic down Central Avenue but very less down Short Street. And we all played in the street there and I would see them around occasionally. Unfortunately they have all passed on with the exception of me. There was five boys and I was one of the five and we were sort of a little gang, we all went to the same school and we all played there. We played cricket we would have a bat and a ball or something, or we'd go down, we go and
- 39:00 play on the beach. There was a park, a kangaroo park, we would go and play there climb the cliffs or whatever, do all the things, all the trouble that kids did. But the back street was our main, main place to play.

How would you describe your personality at that stage?

Oh I was pretty shy guy, I was a pretty shy sort of kid, I didn't go and talk to people easily. And if there was a group of people I tend to stand on the fringe

- 39:30 and I did that even when I was working in the hotel, the night clerk had certain things he had to do, one was to go outside and make sure the blackout was in tact, to take out the blackout screens, the moment the sun put its nose up out of the horizon. I remember I was taking a blackout screens one morning and I looked out to see and the colliers used to run between Newcastle and Sydney the colliers to bring the coal down for the.
- 40:00 And there were four of them being escorted by navy a little navy ship and I thought gee if they are running a convoy between Newcastle and Sydney things are not good. Even I could appreciate that. But I tend to be very quiet, people tell me what to do and I do it. But I didn't make any friends because of the sort of job it was. I mean who do you get to talk to but the night clerk, yourself and the people coming and going.

You said that you were particularly interested in school or

- 40:30 **particularly, particularly a good scholar but what sort of subjects were the ones you favoured?**

I liked maths, I liked, well it wasn't maths it was arithmetic, I liked arithmetic, and I could always sort of manage that, always poor English, very. But maybe it was because I wouldn't try. You know there would be 40 kids in the class and I don't think teachers were all that great either. I look back now, if you are sitting in the back and keeping quite and not putting your hand up

- 41:00 you didn't get into trouble you didn't learn anything either.

Did you, was your imagination captured from a young age as far as the military world was concerned, did you take an interest in finding out about World War I, did that interest in military start at a young age for you?

I took an interest in World War I because of my grandfather. I was very interested in the fact that he had

a photo, which had been taken in

- 41:30 Cairo I guess. And he was wearing an ostrich bloom which had cost him 5 guineas and a patent leather bandolier you know, he was a he always seemed to have some money and this was before he went to Gallipoli. And that interested me the lighthorse. And the war movie came out "40,000 Horsemen", which was made in the Cronulla sandhills, that interested me. I understood the

Tape 2

- 00:34 **Ok Don can you, can you explain why you decided to leave the Christian Brothers school at the age of 13?**

Fear mainly and the chance that I could go to work. And it was very easy as a young person at that time. People weren't asking how old you were for a start and I was tall and skinny, I could have passed

- 01:00 for 15 I guess.

Did you have any problems with your parents or with your grandparents about leaving school? Were they unhappy about that?

I don't think they were all that happy about it but there was no problem.

Alright and you got a job working as a night watchman?

A night clerk.

A night clerk.

Behind the desk in the old, the old Pacific Hotel. And I come on at 11 and I had certain chores to do, apart from that I had a bit of administration,

- 01:30 bit of security, making sure that doors were closed, checking the black out, letting people in if the doors were closed, letting people in that were coming in after 11, switching off all the undue necessary, that, and the lights and that sort of thing. And that would keep me going until about 2 o'clock in the morning and from about 2 to 5 I wouldn't have much to do at all, I would just sit in the office and read a book or something. You'd get the odd phone call in the middle of the night, mainly because you'd have all these

- 02:00 American airmen and American nurses living there and they'd be ringing to check on somebody or tell them to somebody to get up or answer the phone. And then about 5 o'clock there was a morning routine that I would get into. Come 7 o'clock the, the, the assistants porter would come in and take over from me and I would go home.

What did you observe about the Americans that were staying at the hotel?

They had lots of money, that was the main thing I observed. For small chores they were very generous. Make a phone call, I had a phone call,

- 02:30 I had a note left for me one night and it was from a lady who was this pay master, the cashier, and she told me that she wanted to see me the next morning so I had to wait until 7.30 until she came to work, and she asked me would I please pick up my pay every week. I hadn't picked it up for three weeks, it made things very awkward, I didn't need it, I was living on money that people gave me.

So they were good to you?

Yes they were, yes they were. And they went to extraordinary places, one night,

- 03:00 as I said there were about four or five in a room, and in a small bus this mob arrived and I suppose about six or eight of them and they said could they get beer and that at the hotel, we could get beer at the hotel, staff could get a bottle of week if they were very lucky. They said, could I make a phone, so I made a phone call and they said a cab would come in about half an hour, and a cab about 11.30 at night, 12.00 at night in Manly you are joking. About 12.15 a cab did arrive from Sydney and two of these Americans got in it and went away. They were gone for about two

- 03:30 hours and they came back and they had boxes, four boxes of beer, I have no idea where they got it but they said they went over three bridges, so the only way I can work it out was the spit bridge, the harbour bridge and Pyrmont bridge. But they knew where to go, they had an address. It cost them a fortune. They told me how much it cost them I can't remember, but it was a lot of money and.

What kind of service men were they?

They were all aircrew, all aircrew.

And the nurses did you have much to do with them at

- 04:00 **all?**

Some of the first nurses to stay actually came out of the Philippines they had been evacuated from the Philippines before Batan and Korea whatever, not a lot, I would see them and speak to them and they'd speak to me. But not a lot to do, they'd only be there, they'd arrive and. I remember the group that arrived from America, they arrived one morning early about 6 o'clock so I was there. And they arrived, there were about eight of them, and they arrived in a bus with two trucks carrying their luggage and they had these enormous

04:30 trunks you could open like a wardrobe, they had two of those each. And I thought god oh might, they were heavy but I guess they didn't take all of that with them. But they had been here a week and they'd move on, another group would move in.

You were going to school while World War II was on or for some of that time?

Yeah.

Were you taught what was happening and in World War II in different theatres of war while you were at school?

No no no. The teachers didn't talk about the war,

05:00 certainly not at my school. But you knew about it because you went to the movies on a Saturday and you saw the news, you didn't know that the news reels was two months old or three months old but you saw them. You knew about the bombing of London, the blitzkrieg of Dunkirk, I knew all about those places and things, whatever.

So you were, you had a natural interest in what was going on?

I think so yeah. I think so, I could identify planes. I could identify ships going up the coast, I knew it was an Australian ship or an American ship, different structure or

05:30 whatever.

Do you remember what you were doing when the war finished?

I was at work that day. Yeah the war finished and I heard it on the news and I went to work that night.

Did it have much of an impact on you?

Not a great deal no no. No I sort of just going to work at night at 11 to 7 the hotel was a social life for a start, it was great to go down to the beach but you don't get to go out much at night. Particularly if your night off was Wednesday night, it was a

06:00 terrible night to have a night off. No even when the war was on and I started to go to the dances I arrived always late for work, always. But it wasn't a problem.

So did you go and see the victory parades?

No on the news and that, yeah on the newsreel. Moira went over, she went over to town with her mother that day, saw the crowd in Sydney whatever. But no

06:30 Manly was fairly quiet, Manly used to take things very nonchalantly, no one got too excited in Manly ever.

A sleepy place.

Yes yes, 7 miles from Sydney and a thousand miles from care.

And you mentioned that your brother was involved in World War II?

In the air force.

What happened to him?

He was in the air force guard's battalion. And he did things on, he was on Horn island for a while, and then he was on the other the big island next to it and so forth and

07:00 I think he might have been in New Guinea at the end of the war.

Did you have much, did he write letters to you and your family, did you know?

His mother, I'd see, I'd see Madge and she'd say, "Ooh Ken is alright." he is this that and the next thing.

Was it a big concern for your family?

Oh yeah they were worried about him. He wasn't flying I think that was the big thing, he wasn't flying, it wasn't a big problem.

So what was it that really you know

07:30 **the spark or inspired your interest in a military career, was it happening at that young age?**

Well I knew about it and I took an interest in it, but what really sort of swayed me was the guys that

came back from the war to the surf club. They had this thing that you couldn't be part of. They didn't show it or work at it, it was just there. And they were a boat crew, the stroker, the stroker of the second boat, they had both been in New Guinea. And they

08:00 every once in a while, you'd notice that they would be standing there together talking about something, and you knew you weren't part of it. And I sort of, I guess I just envied them a bit this sort of camaraderie they had. That is what swayed me.

Just that, just that you wanted to feel like part of a group?

I think I missed the big adventure, so I went out to find one on my own.

So how did you go about doing that, what did you do, and when did you make that hard decision?

I rolled around to the recruiting office in Pitwater Road,

08:30 at the drill hall and duly joined the army in 1946 at 17. And I was called back two weeks later and there were about 20 of us there, and the guy come up and said, "Mr Donkin." I said, "Me?" He said, "Come here." He was very a very nice fella, he was a captain, he said, "We are very pleased you tried to get in our army but you are only 17." I said, "How do you know that?" He said, "Someone told me, go home." so I went home.

09:00 I would have joined the army earlier, I changed my birthday in January to 48, but we were going to Queensland for these championships and I wanted to do that, we went up on a special train, 600 lifesavers. And as soon as I got back from there in April I joined the army in June.

So you were still working as a night clerk what during that time?

Yes yes. Yes it is the only job I ever had so I left that and went into the army career.

Can you tell us what your first impressions of army life was like?

It was , it was

09:30 pretty basic, I got back. I went over to do these things, I look back from later on and say we must have had thousands of beds in stores and we were sleeping on the floor in palliasses, a palliasse is a hessian bag full of straw, you know and this they did in the early part of World War II. Why they were doing it at the end of World War II is quite beyond me. There must have been hundreds of thousands of mattresses somewhere that someone was counting every day and wouldn't let out of the store. Food was very very basic, I really believe that I was starving to

10:00 death. And of course they weighed you when you got there and they weighed you when you left. And when I left I had put on a stone of weight. But I don't think it was the food, it was all the sleep I was getting. I mean when they finished, we had night marches and things that would finish at 9 o'clock at night, not every night, and there wasn't much to do so you got some shut eye. It was winter.

Where were you doing your training?

Greta, just near Singleton. I think it is Lochinvar, Branxton, Lochinvar, Greta. It was a migrant

10:30 camp after an army camp. And it was cold and fairly miserable, never any hot water, but apart from that it was alright.

What kind of, what kind of people were the other guys that had joined up with you, were they similar circumstance to you?

A guy I see, I see every Anzac Day and every July we have the Training Team reunion, Harry Buckley, Harry Buckley is aborigine and he had the palliasse opposite me, and he came from Darwin and he served in the American small ships from

11:00 the time he was about 13, which was, American small ships went out where they were getting shot at. And when it finished he joined the army, and he and I, he and I got on well. And after we had been there for a week we were in a mess queue, we were in a queue for something and someone pushed Harry out of the way and said, you know, "Get out of the road." I had a couple of words with this bloke, he had one go at me and he missed. He obviously wasn't very good at it. Before I could hit him back Harry flattened him and Harry could really fight

11:30 and everyone went, "Oh god." you know, "black bloke fights like hell." And because I sort of stuck up for him we became good mates, and we see, we see each other now once or twice a year. And at the end of the recruit training you got allocated, and you didn't sit down for a counselling session you got in a queue. And you went before this guy, "What do you want to do son?" "I would like to be an infantry soldier sir." "Well you got to understand that every soldier hasn't got a rifle on his shoulder you know." I thought they did, but anyhow they didn't. "Now do you want to be a brick

12:00 layer, a carpenter or an electrician." and if you said one of these things you went down to Ingleburn to the Service Trade Training STT I can't remember and you did a six months course. And in those days with technology, six months would have made you the greatest plumber or electrician in the world

because they - not the technology of now. Anyhow Harry Butler said he put up his hand and said, "I'll be a carpenter." but I said, I got back in the queue again, come back in, and he said, "Alright we'll

- 12:30 send you down to guards platoon in Victoria Barracks." "Oh that sounds good." So I went down to the guards platoon, Harry went and did this six months course, finished it and then went to Wombarra for three years to build the rocket range, that is whey they were getting all these kids to be carpenters, plumbers. So that was a fairly lucky escape for Don. But got down to Victoria Barracks and found out the guards, there was a company there, an independent headquarters used to own an independent company, 1 platoon was the band, 2 platoon was the ground staff, 3 platoon was the guard. And you
- 13:00 did from 9 to 9, day off, 9 to 9 forever. There was guys that had been there for two years and were waiting to be discharged from interim army doing this guard, which was absolutely terrible. So after being there a couple of months the regular army, so well I thought I will duck over and join the regular army because once I become a regular soldier, they wouldn't expect a regular soldier to stop here doing this.

And you had that choice?

Oh yeah I ducked over. It took three days to join the regular army.

What did that involve?

- 13:30 Oh medicals and interviews and all sorts of things, you had to be super, a couple of people got knocked back I couldn't believe you know. But anyhow I am in the regular army. I'm a regular soldier now, regular army number. Back to Victoria Barracks and you lived there, there was huts out the back and you lived in these army huts, and there was a kitchen, and I thought now they will send me somewhere. They didn't at all and they had no intention until this young officer was going past, it was a Friday afternoon, he was going past and he stopped and came back and said, "Are you a regular soldier?" "Yes I am sir." he said. "We
- 14:00 are looking for drafts for Japan, anybody else?" I said, "There's a couple up inside." and I went inside and got some names from the guard and went away and came back and so I finished the Friday, had the Saturday off, worked on the Sunday and was knocking off the Monday, had Monday off, came back in Tuesday morning and the guard's sergeant, Sergeant McMahon waving his arms and screaming, fairly hysterical, and said to me and two others, "Go and report to the camp commandant immediately." so we went and reported to the camp commandant and he was waving his arms a bit hysterically too, "How dare
- 14:30 you go behind my back, we were disloyal so forth, get out, go and pack your gear and go to eastern command you've got to go to Japan." It was hard not to laugh.

So you spent how long as a guard in all?

June, July I got to Barracks August and I got out of there in January.

So what was going through your mind when you were standing there on guard duty did you think, did you ever think, gosh maybe I've made the wrong decision?

God what have I done I could have been in the navy on a ship.

Is that what you were thinking?

Yeah. Yeah particularly on the ferry going home. There was all

- 15:00 these ships, I want to be on one of those now, you know hanging over the side painting it. But no, no it wasn't the greatest period, it wasn't the greatest stage you'd expect in the army. So I went back to Greta. The army, the army wasn't terribly organised in those days, I went over to the ECP [Eastern Command Personnel], it wasn't the ECP then it was Leave and Transit Depot, LTD, at Marrickville. And I got over there, we got in with all our gear, had the afternoon off, back next
- 15:30 morning, on a train, up to Greta, into Greta, checked into the holding battalion. Next morning over issue with some more gear and some clothing and stuff, next day sent on seven days leave, pre embarkation leave. Why they didn't do that for me... got on the train back to Sydney, finished 7 days, back on the train, back up to Greta.

Did you see Moira at that time?

Yes yes.

So were you two married or engaged at that stage?

No no we were just an item I guess. Yes as they played the marriage farewell

- 16:00 she stood on the wharf and waved. And one of the things there we actually got on a train at Greta that came down through the tunnel at Central down into Darling Harbour where we got off and got on the little ferries and went round to Garden Island and got on the Kanimbla. Fourteen days on the Kanimbla to Japan.

What were your expectations, did you know much about Japan before you got there?

No I knew they dropped an atomic bomb on it, but they couldn't have got it all one would imagine. I knew they fought very well. Didn't

- 16:30 realise how well they adopted to being occupied. And gee they did that very well. I arrived up there and spent this, and I arrived at the battery and the battery were in Tokyo on guard at the palace. So there were only about 20 odd people in the area, and it is winter it is cold, it is very cold.

And you had been allotted to the battery?

Allotted to the battery yes.

When did that happen?

When you arrived, when you arrived in Japan you went to the transit depot at Yokosuka and there you were, you were there a couple of days and then you stood in the

- 17:00 line and went before the major that allocated you. Now if you were a signal you went to signals, if you were a driver you went to transport, if you were an engineer you went to, if you were nobody like about 40, 40 odd you got allocated to 1 off's guard's battalion. So we were allocated there and about 30 of us lined up before the adjutant who was very smartly dressed. "If anybody is not interested in being in the guard's battalion we want you to think about this, go away for ten minutes, come back." So I went away for ten minutes. And the guys were

- 17:30 getting ready to go home on the Kanimbla, they were coming past and I stopped one and I said, "What is the 1 off's guard's battalion?" "Oh you'll love that, they do three days on and one day off you'll love it." So when we got back, "Hands up those who don't want to be in the guard's battalion." Back on the queue and the choice was (UNCLEAR) or A4 Battery and I picked A4 Battery fortunately. So that afternoon I got on a truck and arrived at battery to be their first reinforcement that they had had in six months or something.

So you were

- 18:00 **welcomed?**

Oh Sergeant Ernie Shew was acting BSM [Battery Sergeant Major] spent the next three days organising me, by the time he finished I was in tailored uniforms, beautiful boots, webbing, changed, I wanted to keep my rifle because I liked the rifle, but he had the woodwork changed, I said the woodwork on mine wasn't good enough so he had it changed, I had a chrome bayonet, and I had this bed space with a locker a wardrobe, a desk, a steel trunk to go under my bed.

- 18:30 A lady, a lovely Japanese lady came around every morning and sweep all the floor and dusted it and so forth, didn't make your bed, you had to make your bed. Only washing you did was smalls, all our stuff came back beautifully starched and ironed. And after on the fourth day the battery commander Major Timothy Roderick he was complied with the Governor General's household some years later. He came down and I was paraded before him being the only reinforcement they had had in six months. So he said, "Now what do you want to be, you can be a

- 19:00 gunner a driver, a tara." that is a technical assistant in artillery, or you can be a signaller. Well I had never driven anything in my life, I thought here is a great chance to learn. I said, "I want to be a driver." So he said, "Alright then, Sergeant Shew get Sergeant Farcass over here." he was the transport sergeant. And we waited, he talked to me about where I came from in Manly and so forth and chat and in burst Sergeant Farcass, here is Sergeant Farcass, "He has got to be able to drive two weeks".

It didn't matter that you couldn't, that you didn't

- 19:30 **know how to drive up till then?**

So Sergeant Farcass spent every morning from 8.30 to 12.30 teaching me how to drive, and I spent, the battery area had been built for a regiment and they only occupied a battery. So there were all these kerbed streets with nothing round them, so I spent the afternoon driving around those, learning to drive. So at the end, at the end of two weeks not only could I drive, I could drive fairly well.

What time, what kind of car or vehicle did they teach you to drive?

It was a 3 tonne blitz buggy with a clashed gearbox. And I could actually, by the end of the week I could actually get to change gear, which was a bit of a feat in itself.

- 20:00 So the first job I had was to drive up to railway station Hira and pick up the tin trunks of the guard coming back from Tokyo. That was my first job out of the barracks, so I picked them up and brought them home. And that night I met some people that became friends for the rest of my life.

Really tell us about that night?

Well they all arrived back, because they are pouring into Toby's Tavern where you could go and have your two bottles of beer.

This is part of, in your compound?

This is in the compound. Toby's Tavern was run by the, run

20:30 by the battery, run by bombardier. And I went in there, I knew a couple of people because they were there sort of when I arrived. And one of them was introducing people and one introduced me to gunner Tommy Banfield which I speak, he lives in Brisbane and we talk about once a week on the phone and we were friends for the rest of our lives, and so were some others but he was the main one. We didn't you didn't realise it then but you sort of did later on, when you got to Tokyo, there was the non-fraternisation policy

21:00 and the Commonwealth enforced it, the Americans didn't but it was American rule but they didn't enforce it, but we did.

But you were with BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] anyway?

BCOF. So say for instance you were walking down the main street here, they had a couple of gift shops even in those days, and you stopped into one and the gift shops always had pretty Japanese girls to serve you and you were in there buying something and the provo [Military Police] jeep went past going down the street, and if you were still in the shop when he came back, he would come in and check you, what you were doing. If you were seen carrying a bag,

21:30 I was going up to the basketball court and had a little tiny canvas bag type of thing, and the basketball court is about a five minute walk from the battery area and they stopped and searched my bag.

Why is that?

To see what I was selling.

What kind of selling was going on that they would be worried about?

Oh well you could buy very cheap wool from Woolworths and you get 16 scoes, scans scows what it was. And that was about a kilo, we'll call it a kilo, well my grandmother would buy that and she would

22:00 post it to me in a parcel and I would store it until I got to Tokyo on guard where there was no problem. And in return I would buy gut fishing lines which you couldn't buy in Australia and I would turn them into a figure 8, put them in paper and post it to my grandfather. And into his fishing boats he would sell them and then go and buy more wool. So, so my black market selling wool to the Japanese at 16 scans or something at the time. And Tokyo guard would roll around and you would go up there for normally three weeks, and you do 24 on 48 off

22:30 and you'd get a different post, there was a palace guard, the Canadian legation, the Australian embassy, the British legation, empire house, there were several guards, and the guard change took about an hour with the band out on parade, out on the ginza, the plaza. And this Sunday I cracked No 1 post from 2 to 4 and it was still winter, I was still in service dress. And No 1 post from the palace was right out in the main street. And I reckon the two hours I was on I must have had my

23:00 photo taken 500 times, all by Americans. Big 18 inch bayonet, looking pretty smart. And I was there one morning doing I think it was the 8 to ten shift on a weekday. And I could hear these sirens wailing in the distance and I thought what the hell is that, you can't look around, and we marched up and down and I just got back on my post turned around there, went back to my order arms when Macarthur arrived going to work and he was going to the Daichi building which is half a kilometre down the road on the left. And he had the 12 Harley Davidson in front, the 12 Harley

23:30 Davidsons at the back and his car in the middle. So he used to have the 24 motorbike escort bring him to work every morning. And the Japanese would run down the side streets to get to the main road to bow as he went passed, because I watched them, actually running to get down to the street so that they could bow as he went past.

Why were they doing that, did you ever work out?

Because he was god. He had, he had delivered them from all things. He, earlier on he brought over some union leaders from America and they formed the

24:00 Tokyo Workers Transport Union. And it was, they had the meetings and how do it and elect delegates and on a certain date it become the Tokyo Transport Workers Union. The next day they went on strike, they hadn't had a pay rise in eight years.

And then they got one?

Oh yes oh yes. No vote for the women, he did, he reshaped Japan, he really did.

You mentioned that they

24:30 **were great at being occupied, what did you mean, can you explain what you mean by that?**

The war was over, we were the occupiers and that was it they were the occupied. And they accepted that because the Emperor said, "This is it, you are now occupied." And the Major Origaz had a valet a batman who had been a valet to a Japanese Admiral I think, because just off Kure is Itajuma and that is the, that was the Japanese naval school.

25:00 And we turned it into a hospital and other things. And he would arrive, you'd be on the, you'd be on

guard at the main gate at the battery, and he used to come to work, he used to come to work at 7 o'clock in the morning, he would start bowing about 50 metres away. We used to count him, he would get about 25 bows in in 50 metres, he used to come in tails, top hat and black bow tie to work every morning, quite a sight. Over in Itajuma you went into this magnificent building where you went

25:30 up this marble steps and two big bronze doors opened and there was this big long table and that was the Japanese naval conference room where all the admirals met. And the Salvation Army dropped it into the do drop in where you get coffee and biscuits. It was pretty neat. I spent, I spent about a week, myself and two other gunners and a bombardier spent the two weeks guarding Chinese smugglers they caught and three of them were very sick and they were in a special ward, and we used to sit outside with our

26:00 38 pistol. They were not going to go anywhere they were dying. And the first night I think we used to do 12 hour shifts, from 12 to 12, no 6 to 6, 6 at night till 6 in the morning and I am sitting there reading a book and it is ten o'clock at night and the nursing sister come down and said, "Come on that is your bed there." "Oh right." changed and went to bed, left the pistol there, I am sure she would have woken me up if need be. About 5.30 she woke me up and said, "Breakfast." I had breakfast in bed. I thought it was great.

Did you did you,

26:30 **did you get bored doing that or was it a too exciting environment to?**

Oh it was a great environment, exciting job yeah. No it was, the whole of Japans, it was so much, I had a little thing on the side of my cupboard which told me which training I was going to today, I might be going to aussie rules training at 4, and basketball training at 7 and I was in all the teams. It kept me very busy and very fit, very fit young man.

What was the atmosphere like there for

27:00 **for a military person like you, was it a good feeling?**

We talked about it, it was good soldiering, very good soldiering, and you know four to a table in the mess hall set up, a waitress to each two and three tables, a menu there, you'd say, "I'll have 4, 8 and 6 please." And she would go out and bring me 4, 8 and 6 whatever it was, be it a soup, main course and sweets. And breakfast, eggs anyhow, whatever cereal, food was good, plenty of it. Morning tea was

27:30 always cake and things. And the beacon news would usually be there by morning tea, so we would all have the 45 minute morning tea break while we had our bickies and coffee and read our beacon news which had all the

What was the beacon news?

It was an army newspaper put out in Japan for service personnel and plenty of news from the ABC. They'd print it and come out every day.

Were the other soldiers, were many of them soldiers who had been through World War II or were they new blokes like you?

Oh when I arrived in the battery there would have only been about a dozen soldiers that hadn't been to World War II.

28:00 The rest were all ex-servicemen.

So was that a problem for you in getting along?

No it wasn't, no they accepted us, they did their job, no we were well accepted. I never, I can't remember having a problem with it at all.

Did they speak much about their war experiences?

Not at all no no. They didn't tell war stories in Toby's Tavern. Talked about the football game we one or lost whatever, we used to lose a few because there weren't very many of us.

28:30 When we came home from Japan we had 13 officers, 17 warrant officers and sergeants and 28 commanders. So we were a bit lop sided commander wise, we had a lot of chiefs and not a lot of Indians. Could have stayed in Japan, could have stayed with 3 RAR or 67 battalion it was then, didn't want to do that, wanted to get home.

Did you? Cause?

See my girl.

Yeah. So can you tell us, just give us a bit more of an impression of Japanese

29:00 **life as you saw it, what you noticed of that time?**

We were pretty divorced from it. Apart from those that worked in the, there was a couple of young guys that worked in the transport, they used to clean the vehicles, that was the other thing as a driver, you drove it and you fuelled it and you maintained it but you never had to clean it. And we used to talk to

them and they taught us a little bit of Japanese. And I, when you are young you learn a bit. I was sitting here one night watching the Shogun and I suddenly realised I could understand what they were saying, some of the things they were saying.

- 29:30 But as far as family life and social, that didn't sort of come, that didn't start happening until the mid 50s when they relaxed all the fraternisation, that is when guys could marry Japanese girls. But you you, you were seen walking down a street with a Japanese girl the provos would arrest you.

And and send you home?

Send you to jail first. The non-fraternisation band was very strict in BCOF.

Was there a lot of fraternising going on behind the scenes or?

If you

- 30:00 were, if you were in a unit say northern depot or something, probably yes, but if you are in a field unit say a field battery battalion it is a bit difficult when there is the sergeant, the corporal, the bombardier, the you know the troop commander, they are all sort of there, like the gate shuts at night, how do you get out at night. We used to, we used to go up to the Hiramura, that is the Japanese artillery run up in the mountains. Very, it is only about an hour's drive or 1 ½ out of Kure I suppose.

- 30:30 We'd go up there and we lived in the Japanese barracks, we'd probably see a little bit more of the Japanese up there because we would be out on the field and near when they were farming. That is where we realised they all had little loud speakers up on poles while they were planting the rice, they would be playing the music over the speaker.

Japanese, what classical music?

Oh Japanese music. Ardi Dong and things, we could all sing that at one stage. We had, we had, we had BCOF radio, which

- 31:00 played all, lights out was 10.30, but you could go up to the reading room and have a reading light on if you wanted, the reading room was the top of the barracks. But barrack, barrack lights were out.

What was BCOF radio like?

Oh they played popular music told us sporting results, played the, played the national anthem as the last thing followed by 'I will see you in my dreams', which was always always good.

Did you have, do you remember any conversations that you

- 31:30 **had with the locals at all I mean?**

Not really no. A young gunner no I didn't get to talk to many people. Talked to the waitresses, they'd, one of them when I went back to go to Korea we arrived late that night, we weren't having dinner till about 8.30, 9 o'clock and I waked in and one of them said, "Donkin you've come back." and I used to call her dimples because she had dimples, and she used wait on our table. She was the head lady then, she had been promoted like me. So she was, she was running the mess

- 32:00 hall. The sergeant's mess hall for the gunners yeah.

Did you get to see much of the countryside when you were on leave, the Japanese country?

The only, the only leave you got in Japan was they ran a five day R&R [Rest and Recreation] thing and you went to a R&R centre and they were pretty closely controlled. And the one I went to was in Kobe and it was the hotel the Germans went to for their leave out of Tokyo and it was still being run by the German lady that ran it during the war for the Germans, which was a bit funny, but anyway. Very palatial, very comfortable. And they took you on trips,

- 32:30 and we went to Kyoto to the Tukazuka Opera House, which has the widest stage in the world. And the first day we went for, we were there for about 4 ½ hours they told us and the first hour and a half to two hours was the hits of Broadway and they did it in Japanese. It was very well done, the ballet guy and about 50, 60 girls, and the second part was kabuki and that was watching the grass grow very very slowly and we lasted about an hour in that, and time to move on. One of the long breaks, there

- 33:00 was about a dozen of us and we went and saw the guys and told them it was time we went home now. The kabuki is terrible, terrible theatre.

Would you, would you say that BCOF was doing a good job as the occupiers of Japan?

I would say so yeah. Yeah they were we well liked we didn't do anything nasty, no one hated us. Went and had a look at Hiroshima one day and realised, I realised yeah everything was knocked down except the concrete buildings. If there had been more concrete buildings

- 33:30 there would have been more of Hiroshima. And some years later I learnt for every person killed in Hiroshima there was 3 killed in Tokyo in the firebomb. So people make a, it is probably worst being killed by an atomic bomb than being killed by a fire bomb apparently, but people don't seem to come to grips with that at all.

That is interesting actually.

There is about one hundred thousand killed in Hiroshima and about 400,000 people killed in Tokyo.

Did you, when you went to Hiroshima did it have an impact on you, did you

34:00 **sort of question where the bomb should have been dropped or...?**

Well I didn't think much of it at the time, later on I did. We were reforming two AIF [Australian Imperial Force] divisions on the tablelands, we had, we were pulling them out of New Guinea, putting militia battalion there, we would have five AIF [Australian Imperial Force] battalions in Borneo, plus the New Zealand battalion which had come back so there would be 6 of the ANZAC [Australian New Zealand Army Corps] force. And as far as I could see the Australians were to land in Shikoku they were British were to land in Kyushu and the Americans

34:30 would land on Honshu the main island. And they estimated, the Australians estimations of our landing, they would fight to the death with a sharpened stick, we estimated about 5,000 killed if we landed on, and we didn't, so there was at least 5,000 people happy about that atomic bomb.

What were your impressions of the Japanese before you actually went to Japan, did you, did you have a real resentment to them, given that we just

35:00 **fought them?**

Yeah I was pretty, I thought the, I had an uncle who was a POW.

Did you?

And he died a fairly young man after, after, it knocked him round a bit. I thought they, I know it was their way of life and I know it was their culture but I felt they could have done a little better. Or they could have done a lot better.

So when you actually went there were your reservations, sort of did they dissipate as you got to know the country and the people, or observe, what you observed did it change?

35:30 The day the Kanimbla pulled in it was winter and very very cold. And I got my gear organised to disembark and it was already to go and people were still milling around panicking trying to find things. And I walked up onto the boat deck, the boat deck had landing barges. And standing at the rail was a bloke I recognised from Greta. And he had a row and a half of ribbons up and he was leaning on the rail and there was a big dockside crane. And the crane driver was out of his little cabin leaning on the rail and they were both talking in Japanese. And I walked up and I stood right

36:00 next to him I stood near him and when he finished I said, "Oh, you speak Japanese where did you learn that?" He said, "Here." He had been a POW and he was going back, and he didn't seem to resent it at all, he wasn't yelling at this guy on the crane. And I said, "Well what were you talking about?" He said, "We were talking about the weather, it is bloody cold isn't it?" Yeah, yeah.

So what kind of lesson did that teach you, what did that make you feel?

He wasn't craggy

36:30 about, what was I getting on about. Treated with, I guess down in Hiro we kept to ourselves, or we were made to keep to ourselves to a large degree.

So what were your observations of the way the Japanese interacted with, with BCOF personnel, what, I know that there wasn't much conversation going on but were they very subservient or obedient or were they I mean what what did you observe during that

37:00 **time?**

Yeah if you were, if you said something and our guys on a whole, with the girls that worked in the dinning room our guys were very polite, I thought they were anyhow, and they were polite back. Our cooks didn't cook anything, our cooks were there in beaut white things and they were, they watched the four Japanese cook, who cooked breakfast then go and have a shower and get change into a white t-shirt and white trousers and cook lunch and go and have a shower and get changed into a white t-shirt, they get changed three times a day. And that was something I had trouble coming to grips with, they were

37:30 personally they were so clean. But the butcher shop would have the meat laying out on a wooden slab at the front door you know. God you know, if only they were just as good as the way they displayed food as they are with themselves they'd be right. But they were, were very tidy, very punctual. They didn't have a lot of choices of course but no, no I think we were doing a good job, I thought we weren't punching people and knocking people down. There was going to be a demonstration in Hiroshima and we

38:00 loaded up the trucks and put our guns on the back and we drove down through Hiroshima circle round the main road and came back again, apparently the people that were going to have the demonstration decided that wasn't a good idea, we didn't do anything we just drove there and drove back really, it was called a show of force.

And no one turned up?

No one turned up for the demo.

So you were in Japan for 11 months in all?

Yeah yeah.

What would you say that you learnt from that experience?

38:30 How to drive, how to get on with people, a different culture, another country, being overseas. When we were going up, the Kanimbla always stops at the Drega harbour, Ranimac [?] to re-water mainly. And we stopped there and you stop, you get in early in the morning and you leave late in the afternoon. And we got in there and you were allowed to go on this great big wharf and walk around in circles if you want to. And about four or five of us did walk down and we were sitting on the wharf in the shade,

39:00 and the army warrant officer turned up with his two Papua and New Guinea battalion soldiers in their lap laps and 303 rifles and their 40 Japanese prisoners with their big packs on, these are the guys that had been witnesses and things on Manus island where we had run the war control and they were going back home in the forecastle hull in the Kanimbla. And one of, one of our blokes said to the warrant officer, "Gee you haven't got many guards." and he said, "More than enough son." yeah right,

39:30 more than enough. And they had their great big packs on their back and down they went. And they were first off the ship, they brought them off early and found out later on that the Japanese discharge, the Japanese army discharge was fairly simple, you arrived at this office with whatever you were wearing and whatever you were carrying and you told him where you came from and he would give you a railway ticket to get there. And away you went, there was no deferred pay or severance pay or.

How were you paid while you were over there, was it a decent wage that you were getting?

40:00 Soldiers weren't paid well at all. But we were paid in Baff, which is Commonwealth, they are vouchers, you, you use them in the canteen, you can't buy anything in the Japanese with them, but you use them in your own canteen, your own gift shop or whatever. You can't have, you couldn't have American money. Americans were paid in a script, occupation money, and you couldn't have Yen, you weren't allowed to have Yen. So you had to be very careful with your shoe polish and not use it too much,

40:30 because a tin of kiwi polish was about, oh about 300 Yen, that would get you two or three lunches and a couple of beers with each lunch so when you go into Tokyo, everyone would be, you noticed everyone being very careful polishing their shoes very well but very careful how much polish they were using. Same with soap.

Did you get to go out in Tokyo at all?

Oh yes yes yes. Tokyo was a big city, an enormous city, we were at Ebisu which is only about four stations out of the centre of Tokyo. And they opened a beer hall, the

41:00 German beer hall and the Ginza was our favourite because it was a big German hall. And we'd go there of an afternoon and have some beers and go back to the Union Jack Club and have dinner, head home. The big thing in Tokyo was to enjoy it but not get into any trouble because they had in Tokyo what was called the snowdrops. They were the American MPs [Military Police] that wear white helmets, hence the name snowdrops. And they carried big batons and they would use them for almost any reason. So you didn't ever get into trouble and you were never caught in out of bounds

41:30 areas, a lot of the main roads were out of bounds areas. So you were always very very good. And those that weren't very very good always regretted it

Did you mix with the Americans at all while you were there?

Yeah a little bit yeah.

How did you find the Americans?

We went back for the 4th of July parade at 1st Cavalier Barracks and yeah they were alright, they were sort of our age, they were getting paid about five times more than we were, always a bit hurtful. But.

And the British?

They had better clothes than we did too. We were getting paid about three times more than the British,

42:00 which I could, I could never understand.

Tape 3

00:32 **Just before we go back to Japan and talk about coming back to Australia, and what happened next for you, I just wanted to go back to a few earlier points just to get a little bit more**

information here and there Don could you just explain to us a little more about how you came to meet Moira?

As I said you had to learn to dance, if you couldn't dance you

01:00 didn't get a dance and you didn't meet girls. Because the two rules in those days, you went to a dance first of all you had to be able to dance, you had to be sober, so you didn't drink and you learnt to dance. So I was going to the school of Manly Ballroom Dancing, which is in Whistler Street, you went up a flight of stairs. And I used to go two nights a week, it went for about 2 ½ hours. And this night I arrived and a fellow I knew from football, I used to play in his team, we were walking up the stairs and in front of him was a girl. I said, "G'day Sandy." he said, "Don, this is my sister Moira." I looked up and there was the love of my life

01:30 as I said before, and she really was. I knew at that moment, so we got to know, over the next couple of weeks we were doing our, as you progress in dancing you did medals, a couple of Saturdays later we were doing our bronze medallion of dancing, which you really wouldn't tell special forces about. But anyhow, and we were dancing not together but at the same time, and we got to know each other and we went out a couple of times as a group. And then finally we went out as a pair.

Did you ask her at any stage

02:00 **whether she felt the initial attraction the way you did?**

No no I was fairly shy.

I better quiz her at lunchtime.

I was just happy she was going out with me. I believe she was quite attracted to me, later years people told me, her friends, but.

So you were about 16 at that stage?

17 Moira was 16, I was 17.

So what what what

02:30 **stage was that relationship at the stage that you went over to Japan?**

Well we were going to the movies and the dances together before Japan, and I don't think anybody at that stage was planning the rest of your life. And we went over and I came back a soldier who had been overseas and probably spent more time with my friends, than with my girlfriend. And she one night she said, "I'm going out." I said, "Saturday night for the movies?" And she said, "Oh sorry I've got a date Saturday night." So

03:00 we parted and that must have been I don't know February, January, end of January.

So you had been back from Japan for how long?

I finished leave and I had gone back to barracks, I had 21 days leave and I went back to North Head. So I went off to do this driver's course, which took 3 months, 12 weeks, in February.

Just before we go into the details of that course, just a couple of other quick things, having

03:30 **having decided that the military life was for you, that you wanted to take it on, how were you feeling about that decision by the time you came back from Japan was that, did you feel like you had found your niche?**

Yeah I was a soldier by the time I left Japan and I could see nothing else, really.

What were you enjoying about it?

I actually liked the discipline. The what you did I found

04:00 you know parades and things weren't something I dodged or got out of duty, I liked being a gunner, I liked being a driver. No I enjoyed, I liked barrack life, yeah I enjoyed it.

And that sense of friendship and camaraderie that first beckoned to you when you saw those blokes at the surf club was that side of the story also there for you?

Certainly

04:30 certainly yeah. I didn't make a lot of close friends in the army, I made a few but they became life long friends. Because you know people say, you move around a lot in the army, you don't stay with the one group of people which is either a good thing or a bad thing but there are a couple of people I remained good friends all my life.

So after spending that time in Japan, were you starting to think about where you wanted to go with this career of yours in the

05:00 **military, did you have any definite ideas?**

I wanted to be promoted. As soon as possible. And of course there was no promotion at all, it was so bad that when we do Victoria Barracks guard, which was two weeks they would select four people and give them one stripe for the two weeks. And when you come back you had to take it back down again.

Why do they have that policy?

Because they were over, over over promoted, all these people stayed on from World War II, it was all corporals and sergeants and warrant officers, not a lot of privates stayed on, and of course there was no vacancies.

05:30 So they thought they would put this embargo for 18 months no promotion at all. And that held right to the end of 1949.

Did that make for any animosity between the new guys, the new regular army who were starting to feel that way the way you were feeling and the other guys who had the rank from war?

Not really because you could see, the writing was on the wall, the army was

06:00 culling and culling fast, if you didn't move on they posted you somewhere where you weren't going to go anyhow. So you moved on, but you could see that they were sort of sorting it out because there was a lot of dead wood stayed behind in the army after the war. I mean those those with any go wanted to get out quickly to get a job. Be the first for a job, not a lot, a lot a lot stayed and became very good career soldiers, but there were some didn't. But the army culled that out.

How long do you think that

06:30 **process of culling roughly took?**

Promotion started in 50s, they started running NCO courses in 1950, which I went to one at North Head. And I finished my NCO course and started instructing on the next one. So it came fairly quickly for me, I was a bombardier then. And I finished instructing and I had been a technical assistant by accident or by design, and how that happened, not long after we got back from Japan I was going back to the driveway after

07:00 morning tea and was told I should be in the gymnasium doing the TARA course, why wasn't I there. Mainly I wasn't there because no one told me about it. So I duly appeared in the gymnasium and there were half a dozen people there learning how to be technical assistants and I was supposed to be one of them, no hence I started.

Well alright lets go back to just when you arrived back in Australia after Japan where you were about to tell us about a driving course that you were to undertake?

Yeah came back, went on leave, went back into barracks

07:30 at North Head. And there is an advanced driving course where you learn to be a bit of a mechanic as well, not a great mechanic but a bit of a one, fixing. And it was at Ingleburn and I applied for it and got it and I went there in March. And I was there for March, April, May. And I came back, it might have been a bit longer than that, it might have been in the middle of June because I came back out of that, and I was only back in the battery a couple of weeks and I was on my way to Marrangaroo the coal strike.

08:00 **Before we talk about that can you give us a little bit of background on the battery, as far as being you know the main unit in the Sydney area?**

Well it was, it was the only field unit in the Sydney area. The back in North Head was the battery depot, 53rd and when we came home, they they disbanded and became part of a field battery. So we went from having about 20 gunners to having about 80 gunners, actually soldiers to man guns

08:30 and things. And we started doing, started doing shooting for CMF [Citizens Military Force] units, because all the CMF was booming, all the people World War II were joining the CMF, a lot of young people. And the artillery units hadn't trained up to the stage where they could actually go out and shoot and support at Singleton. So we used to spend a lot of time at Singleton firing. Which was, which was good, I mean if you are trained to do something and you actually do it, that is fun. So that was, that took up, the NCO courses,

09:00 a couple of trips to Singleton for two or three weeks at a time, the coal strike, so that cut 49 out completely.

So how big was the set up at North Head?

Well that stage of the game there was just the one battery, there was A Battery. And in 1950 they formed B Battery which is heavy aircraft and that was the extent of one field regiment. A Field battery and an aircraft battery, which is impossible. But they did it.

Well how

09:30 **many, what were the facilities like there?**

North Head was great barracks, it was built in 1937, that is the garrison barracks for the coast artillery, two 9 guns where there. And it was great facilities, six to a room but the rooms were divided up into six cubicles, wardrobes and things. Everyone used to always comment how good, it was always hot water, because they have enormous boiler room, big kitchens, big mess hall, the food was good, it was ten minutes walk from Manly.

10:00 Which most people appreciated more than anything, the fact that Manly was so close.

So it was a good wicket for you?

Oh yes yes, excellent. Yep.

Alright can you explain, take us through the time where you ended up going to the mine and why that took place?

We it was in the news well what would happen, you would come home from work and the power in your area would go off from 5 o'clock at night to 9 at night you had no power at all.

10:30 And people were buying kerosene heaters and all sorts of things and cooking the food when the power was on and leaving it to heat up on their kerosene heaters. And the miners were on strike for all sorts of reasons and some of them fairly unreasonable. And Chifley was the Prime Minister of the Labour government and they wouldn't give into them, they thought the labour government would give into them but they didn't. And it got to the stage where Bunarong was the main pad, there was Bunarong and White Bay but Bunarong would have had to close down in a couple of days time.

11:00 And Chifley said, "We'll put the forces in." and General Berimar he was the organiser, the commander of east command. And some very quick planning and really, there was a bit of a panic there but it worked out fairly well. I mean on Friday night I am washing dishes in the sergeants' mess and Saturday morning I am learning to drive a bulldozer, because I had a heavy vehicle licence. And I, I trained Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday morning I was on a train to Marrangaroo with about six

11:30 other guys. I got up there. Marrangaroo is an ammunition depot and the main line has a branch line, obviously ammunition you have to have it so a train can go into it. So the branch line goes into Marrangaroo and our train pulls in just on dark at about 5 o'clock at night. There is about 250 people on the train and the camps there still need to be stacked in bundles. So it is dark, find a tent, find three other people, put up a tent, get back down into the valley, draw your three blankets and pillow. Because everyone is everyone is going back second and

12:00 third time, to have night blankets and three pillows. So that is why ran out of blankets very quickly, it is freezing they set up field kitchens, these field cookers, and they were turning out fairly good food, it was hot and the, we were in there and the next day, we sort of, we need a couple of days to get organised here. So we were getting organised that morning and a man came around and said, "Everybody ready to pull out in the truck in half an hour, make sure you are in your work gear." So I went to Carmaine East, I always say Carmine West instead of Carmine

12:30 East. And it is a big open cut mine. And we arrive there and the mine supervisor met us. He went around and showed, we had an engineer captain, he went around and showed what was what and so forth. And the captain took me down to this bulldozer and said, "That's yours you drive it." I said, "Right" it was very big, it was three times the size I had been learning on. And it had hydraulic, hydraulic operation, and the things I had been running was a wire operation.

13:00 So it took me a couple of hours to work out how to get it started and how to work it. And after a couple of days I could handle it and push it around. So I'd push over - not so much overburdened but I'd push coal up to be organised. By about 5 o'clock that afternoon our engineers were driving the buckeye shovels and we were sending up truckloads of coal to the gantry which was about a 20 minute drive away, and they were tipping it onto a train that was on standby. And they got the train full by about ten o'clock at night and they green lighted that train

13:30 to Bunarong. At that stage of the game they had the council workers from various council grounds, sweeping what was left of the coal into little heaps so they could take it and put it into the boilers. And that train pulled right into the site we were told later on. It unloaded there and they were taking coal from that train to put in the coal driven furnaces, so it was all pretty grime. And then we, they let us, we could leave out of the, we had about 40 on our shift and we could leave back each day, they could get the camp, make the camp better and so

14:00 forth. And the first thing we did was get the tents in line because, they were just put up where it was you couldn't find anyone. So they got the tents organised and General Berimare come in. They got a big mess hall going, started serving meals at 4.30 in the morning and went to ten o'clock at night, never stopped, depending what time you walked in to what sort of meal you got. And after about a week, it wouldn't have been a week, he come up and asked some of the soldiers what would they like, well first of all they would like a tent with booze in it, that would be handy. Well you couldn't buy a beer in Sydney, in New South

14:30 Wales. Because the breweries had closed down, they had been closed for weeks.

Why was that?

Because of the power. So he, he put a convoy with 20 trucks together with a provo escort and sent them to Albury and they bought out every the pub. They brought the booze back. And in two days later they opened up a beer tent. Which opened shifted hours. But when we knocked off at night we'd go down and get a beer. So we did that for five weeks. One of the things that had happened, we had only been working there for two, for a couple of days and our warrant officer was Jack Horner, a big bugger

15:00 man. And I driving, I drove one of, there were two work trucks and I drove one of them and climbed back into the truck, "Anyone like to have a beer." wouldn't mind that, covered in coal dust, so we pulled round about ten minutes drive away and we pulled into Portland, pull up at the pub, two beers each and back on the pub. Ok. So we are walking and the bar is packed with miners. It is 6 o'clock at night and the pub is about to shut. And a little wizened up old miner walked up and said, "Righto you blokes stand back, these fellas have been walking all day". So we got

15:30 in and I think there were ten or 12 of us, give us 12 beers and the barmaid put them on the bar and the old bloke said, "I'll pay for these." he paid for the beers, "How is it going out there?" "It is bloody cold. " We had a bit of a talk to them and the talk started again and as we were going out he stopped and talk to the warrant officer Jack Horner. And when we came over to the truck we said, "What did he say?" "Pleased we came because they were going to give in but this will break the strike." So it was a two way thing. So that finished.

16:00 **How did you feel about being assigned that work initially?**

It is just a job you know. Soldiers do jobs, they not to reason why.

So the general morale while you were doing that work?

It was good, there was north forth and west force, north force was Singleton and west force was at Marrangaroo. And they had a big board up, it showed the coal production for the day from, we always

16:30 beat north force, always. So we rolled back and the OC said, "Everyone will have seven days leave the moment they arrive back in their unit, they will not defer it, they will take it straight away, the units will remain closed down." At North Head one of our diggers had to take a truck down, one of our gunners had to take a truck back to Sydney for some reason or other to pick up some stores or something. So he ducked over to North Head with his truck to get something out of his cupboard. And standing on the gate on guard with a pistol is the battery commander. And the pick of that night was the BSM battery commander and the

17:00 adjutant of the school army. "This is the only people here sir." he said. "Well they're serving the meals in the officers mess and the last time I sat down there was 7". So there weren't a lot of people there, they cleaned out every unit, the last man, and the navy guys were running the communications, the air force were running the medical services. So the Commonwealth Police were guarding the tops of the hills. And they thought there'd be trouble, there wasn't any trouble, a couple of incidents. We had problems because our guys, they brought all the engineers.

17:30 from Wombarra. And they used to drive these little buckeye shovels, enormous shovel not in our mine, in another mine, commonwealth mine it was. It used to lift whatever tonnage. And this young sapper got in and he got it going and we were driving the truck back, little 3 tonne truck back round, swung it round opened the door, and he broke the back of the truck. First up and we confiscated all of the truck, all the fox trucks had been confiscated and driven up and at the end of it, your mechanic and an army mechanic went down and appraised your vehicle

18:00 and you got so much a day depending on the tonnage it would carry and so much to repair it. And there was a guy there with an army ex army 3 tonne blitz painted, I always remember it, it was painted red and yellow and they confiscated, got half way to the field park where the vehicles were at Marrangaroo and they had to tow it the rest. It never left the field park. And on the, we heard the story later on when he got his assessment he got 400 quid. That is starting because he'd go out and buy a decent truck, so he got 400 quid for his truck just sitting there.

18:30 **So what sort of trouble were they anticipating?**

Oh the miners would revolt and there'd be Eureka stockade and they'd be firing on us. No that never happened, never at all.

So the only time you really encountered the miners were?

In the pub yeah and they bought us a beer, yeah they bought us a beer. And we, all sorts of things, a couple of times, a couple of days when I wasn't driving the days I'd drive a truck, a tip truck

19:00 and I would back up and there was always this digger standing at the gantry, you'd back in and tip the truck and your stuff went down into the coal train, it was full and they moved forward and you'd fill in, and this thing was always standing there, so one day I said, "What do you do?" and he said, "I stand next to the red button." I said, "What is that for?" he said, "Well when the load won't move, we've had it happen twice the driver gets out and stands on top of the load and tries to go with the shovel and it all goes including him." so he was there to stop, stop the next load going in on top of him. It happened twice, so a lot of things we did didn't work out that well.

19:30 But it was, it was a pretty good effort really, from scratch and from very little planning.

Was there a response in the press to that effort?

Not really no. You know I, I always got the impression that that is what you were expected to do, and why didn't we do it earlier. You know anyhow we did.

So what happened next for you?

Came home.

20:00 Met Moira down at the MAM, the dance. Started going out again.

So this is after how much of a break?

Oh what will it be, six months, seven months, six months.

Had you been pondering the absence in the meantime?

Oh I missed her madly, oh god heartbroken. Absolutely heartbroken.

So that little separation was pretty much initiated by her because of your unavailability?

I had been

20:30 too much a soldier surfer I guess yeah. Not paying enough much attention.

So quite by accident you stumbled into this dance?

I don't think it was an accident.

Bit of planning?

Bit of planning, forethought and hoping. Yeah.

So the operation was successful?

It was very nice to get back together again, very nice.

So she received you well that evening?

Yes she did, brought her home to here, to here as a matter of fact.

21:00 **So you were, how old were you both at that stage?**

It was what '49, 20. We got engaged at the end of the year on New Years Eve. Went to town bought her a ring, announced it that night down at the surf club dance. Another couple also announced theirs, which we have known them forever. And got married the following March, March '51.

21:30 **So you, you were reunited with Moira at the dance and what happened career wise round about that time?**

Shooting at Singleton. 50 was more courses, did a survey course, did a sound ranging course, did PT course and a very early PT course which was a bloody waste of time.

Can you tell us a little bit about that one?

The PT [physical training] course. In those days PT wasn't, it was seen as

22:00 vaulting and parallel bars and roman rings, gymnastics and I could never see what bearing that had being a good soldier. But that was the way it went, if you weren't a good gymnastic you couldn't really pass the course. They used to sort them out, like later on though, one of those courses that I did was called a battle PT course, you never wore shorts on it, you wore boots, green trousers and a web belt. And all the training was done out in the field, medicine balls and poles and that, was the way it was designed, so you could go

22:30 back to your unit, you didn't need equipment you took it outside in the field and you could train them. So that was done in 1950, it rolled through, road a few surf boats during that time with the junior crew I had.

So you managed to maintain involvement with your surf club through your service?

Yeah pretty much, yeah pretty much. And then, and then in 1951 the battery was going to Singleton and we'd be gone a month. But I came back early to get

23:00 married. I came back a week early. And we went up there and went away and I came back on the Thursday and we were married on the Saturday. And we went to Jervis Bay for a honeymoon and we stayed in what is now, what is now the Petty Officers' mess, it was Folies Hotel then. Because the navy didn't come back to Jervis bay straight after the war. They didn't come back until the middle of the 50s to there. And it was a holiday resort, and all the barracks now were the midshipmen, there was the main base guesthouse and the yard arm guesthouse. And

23:30 we had two weeks there, it was absolutely magnificent, no brothers or sisters or mothers or fathers or

anything, just Moira and I. It was great. Got the train down and the bus out there and it arrived on the Sunday afternoon with all the people sitting on the veranda. Moira was carrying the Sunday paper and she probably dropped it in front of everybody, "Oh they are honeymooners aren't they?" We were there for the two weeks and came back.

Was that a popular destination in those days?

It was then yeah very much so. We came back and I finished my

24:00 leave and reported back to North Head. I had to report in there on the Monday, I went up reported to the order room here I am I am reporting back, "What are you doing here?" "Where should I be?" "You should be at Georges Heights, the regiment moved while you were on leave." so I waited about an hour, got a, a vehicle took me over to Georges Heights where we were then. A Battery and head regiment head quarters were top in Georges Heights.

Why had that move been made?

It was on all the while but information didn't flow a lot in those days,

24:30 I asked around a lot of people didn't know what was happening and down on middle head was 103 Battery which was the heavy anti aircraft battery and 104 Battery which was the locating battery and this was one full regiment. And that sort of set up is impossible military wise but that is the way it was. So there we were back there.

What were those barracks like?

Built the turn of the century for the garrison artillery again. They built some new huts,

25:00 hut type buildings for the soldiers, which wasn't too bad at all, it wasn't too bad, very old, and it took an enormous amount of maintenance to keep it going, but it was, it was close to the city for the soldiers. They liked it. A bit of a hassle getting home because you had to get to the spit junction and then you would get a bus to Manly and then I had to get a bus to Harbord. And that was a bit of a hassle but not really. I would get a bus at 6 o'clock in the morning if we were going early or something. So that was '51.

25:30 Few courses, did some courses and things.

Would you be living in the barracks Monday to Friday and coming home on the weekend?

No no, I was a living out soldier and you got paid, I was getting marriage allowance. In those days married soldiers got a marriage allowance and single soldiers didn't. And it was no good saying, "I'm living with this in a partnership with this lady." because you couldn't get a marriage allowance unless you could produce a marriage certificate. But which I couldn't work out

26:00 ever, anyhow that was the system.

So if you weren't married were you still able to be a living out soldier?

Yes you could, you could apply to live out and your CO [Commanding Officer] had to approve it. And he might say, "No you are too young to live out. I don't want you to go out living with those girls in sin, stay in the barracks with the boys." That was it.

So you were living out from the time you got married?

Yep yep except we give, we go away for a three weeks

26:30 to Singleton or a week to Holsworthy and then of course you didn't. And we'd go to Holsworthy for a day or two days every week almost to shoot or something. We were the only artillery unit, we were the only unit. We forever did guards of honour. Because there was no battalion and when we came back from Japan, 67 battalion had become 3 Stage in Japan, 66 had become 2 in Enoggera and 65 went to Puckapunyal, it was the other way around

27:00 2 went to Pucka [Puckapunyal] and 3 went to Enoggera. But there was no battalion, so there was the engineers which they don't do guards honour they built buildings. So there was A Battery and we would do these terrible guards of honour. The anniversary of Captain Cook's landing at Kurnell was always a ripper because there was no road to Kurnell. So you had to get to La Perouse, get on the little ferry, get over there in time so the ferries could come back and pick up their guests. Do a guard of honour when the governor arrived. Do a guard of honour at the actual ceremony. Wait till lunch finished. Do a

27:30 guard of honour, a little salute thing when they were leaving on the ferries, wait until the ferries went back over, come back pick you up, take you to the busses. So you, we'd leave the barracks at bloody 8 o'clock in the morning and we would get back at 8 o'clock at night you know. Opening of parliament anything you could think of we did a guard of honour for.

So was a guard of honour always a tedious day for you?

Pith helmets and blues jackets, buttons had 19 brass buttons, button to the neck, white webbing belt, blues trousers with a red strip down the side. Took you a

28:00 while to get organised to get on it, let alone do it. Yeah. Male, male, a brass chain chinstrap, brasses dome ornament on top.

Was it challenging not to faint sometimes, were there situations where you had to stand for a long time?

I used to work out how long I could stay there and I used to work out what I could think of other than standing there and I would do that, some couldn't come couldn't. Some would

28:30 we had guys that always passed out and eventually someone would say, "Hey the last three guards of honours he has passed out and split his head open each time, obviously he is not faking this." and they tend to leave him off, or they'd make them reserve or something. But no I could always, or watch something, you'd see something focus, focus on something other than standing still. And I could do that and get away with it. A lot of people I know could never come to grips, a training soldier for a guard had to practice sort of

29:00 standing still. A major at North Head went past and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "We are practicing for the guard." He said, "You haven't moved for ten minutes." "You got that one right." Yeah.

Were there, were you given techniques like make sure you move your toes and all that sort of thing?

Don't stand stiffly, that is the only technique, if you stand stiffly you will fall over. Stand without, relax without being sloppy is the is the right sort of word. At least you will

29:30 pretty right, but you really have to think of something else.

So what was the next move for you?

Well we got over 51 doing various courses. I'm a bombardier, I'm a 3 star bombardier, which is almost getting the same pay as a sergeant. Moira is still working at this company she worked for. They gave her great Christmas bonuses.

What company was that?

It was the crowd of the Simpson's, they handled everything for Simpson's washing machines so forth, they were importers exporters.

30:00 Small company, they were run by a father and a couple of brothers. And it was excellent, the bonuses were a couple of hundred pounds at the end of the year, it was a lot of money. And we were living, we were living when we come back we lived in a garage in Brighton Street which was unlined for some many months and then we moved into a better garage up in, up in, sorry Bennet Street then Brighton Street. It was a big garage it had inside kitchen, shower, very very cosy. And we had it furnished and we liked that.

30:30 And it wasn't until I went to Korea that Moira had to move out to look after her Mum, she was having a lot of trouble. So we got over '51 and into '52 and we were doing the guard of honour for 1 RAR to go to Korea. And I'm there with Tommy Banfield and our wives are in town. So after guard of honour we send our rifles and whatnot back and we are going to stay in town and have a meal and see a show.

31:00 And Tommy insisted, he said, "We will just ring in and tell them." I said, "I told the sergeant major what we were doing." he was a very nice bloke what we were doing, "I'll just check with him." so Tom rang about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and he said, "Be here at 6 in the morning you are leaving for Singleton." so we got there at 6 in the morning, about 8 o'clock we pulled out in a convoy of 50, the whole guard was going to Singleton. And what happened, was there was a school cadet camp going on there, and the old stag hound armoured car

31:30 used to fire a 37mm shell about that long and about that round and either fired a 8P1 armour piercing or it could fire one with a HE [High Explosive], the only way you could tell if it had a brass, a brass plug on the back. And one of these kids had found one and they were in the tent, standing on top of the bed with a circle dropping it to see if they could hit the thing, and about the fourth or fifth time it went off, killed two of them and wounded three of them badly. So they decided we would search the range for ammunition. So here we are, it is

32:00 February, it is very hot and we are walking ten metres apart with a handful of little stickers with red tags on putting them in the ground, and we are doing this and we are doing this, not only was it was boring it was hot. And after two weeks we come back that night and they said, "You've got to go back to the regiment tomorrow." Oh good good good good. So I jump on the train that night, back to the regiment, home back in next morning and I'm going to Kapooka. And I'm going the next day so I've been back two nights

32:30 and I go to Kapooka and I'm going for ten weeks to put one platoon through their training, so arrived down there to find Kapooka is 1 battalion recruit training and they are just forming the second battalion. And they've got an E company, which nobody has an E company and in that E company is a 17 platoon and nobody has a 17 platoon. And there is 45 guys in this bloody platoon. And they have no NC officer. And I arrived there at night, next morning I am lead down there by a captain he said, "They are all yours."

33:00 so we sort of got together and worked out what was going on and the next day he said, "We are all moving over there onto that hills where all those little huts are." That hadn't been lived in since World War II but they have got the power back on. So we get a truck with all the furniture over there, so now I am no longer 17 platoon E company I am 1 platoon a company of 2RTB of Two Recruit Training Battalion. And there is me, and there is private Beriman who has just finished his recruit course. And he is my assistant instructor and we've got 40 odd guys that we are going to train.

33:30 And there is nobody else, so that means you take 9 periods a day. You go round in the morning and make sure they are all awake and alive and get them out of bed, you parade them, you do the 9 periods with Beriman and get him various bits of equipment that you need, which there wasn't a lot of. You sign them off in the afternoon, you make sure they have all got their gear out and they are washing their clothes and so forth. And it is 9 o'clock at night, this goes on every day forever, and they graduate, they finish their ten weeks of training and it is all over. But we just want you to do another one.

34:00 So.

Is this the first time you'd been in that sort of capacity of training?

Yeah yeah.

How did you find that you took to it, even though it was such a demanding program?

I could manage it. I really could, I really could, if I hadn't of been in bloody Kapooka I would have liked it. So after 2 ½ platoons worth, you know that is 25 weeks, that is very close to half a year. General Beriman has come down to inspect us and I'm doing a demonstration on my platoon with bayonet fighting, bayonet fighting used to be very big. All with your shirts off and into it and

34:30 Sweating and ripping into these dummies. And major Grosvener was our company commander a very nice guy. And when it was all over he pulls the other bombardier and myself and said, "If you two can get cleared you can go home tonight." It was not a challenge, we were cleared, the Q [Quarter Master] store returned our gear, handed over, I had a couple of NCOs and one of them took over by the platoon sergeant. Then and Pat and I were on the train home. We arrived home with, we'd rung ahead, they got a jeep to pick us up from Central and we

35:00 roar into Georges Heights, into the orderly room and the staff sergeant Terry Radford said, "Welcome back fellas there is a." it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon, he said, to Pat, "There is a meal for you in the, in the mess over there and for you Sergeant Donkin there is a meal in the sergeants' mess." I had been promoted two weeks after I went to Kapooka and no one told me. God. So now I'm a sergeant technical assistant of baker troop now it is bravos made up of, it used to be baker troop then.

35:30 And it is getting towards the end of, the end of 52 and we, we'd do, we do a couple more, we do a Singleton thing, and we are back from that. And I did another course early in 53, two week, a sergeant technical course. And we did, a couple of us were shooting at Holsworthy for a day or so every week. We were going to Singleton for at least a couple of weeks every, at least every two months.

36:00 And it rolls in towards April and I'm told I am going to Korea. And I never sort of found a hook up till I got to 4 Battalion and Major Grosvener there was the 2IC [Second in Charge] of the battalion and they were putting forward names and betting and they were rejecting people for call conversion to sergeant and my name come up and he is not rejected he is taken. The regiment put forward six names or eight names or whatever. So I'm out to 4 Battalion and it is I'm training there to be a platoon sergeant instead of a

36:30 mortar sergeant and Moira is expecting and I am on the plane, I'm on the 707 sorry it wasn't a 707 it was a DC6B.

Just before we talk about the flight, the training that you are coordinating at Kapooka was that just recruit training, basic, fundamental recruit training?

Recruit training, basic training, yeah yeah, field craft, drill, bayonet drill, bren gun, strip, assemble, fire.

37:00 Very basic, very basic.

And how closely had you been following the developments of the Korean war at that point?

Very closely, very closely. And this is one of the problems they had at Kapooka. They picked all these sergeants and people and one, the morning we took over the platoons there were about 20 of us and we were all standing around there and out come this major and a captain. And a warrant officer and they are training themselves, "Alright we want each of you guys to come out and do a little

37:30 two minute thing in training." Now Pat and I bombardiers are over instructing on the NCOs course at North Head. So I said to Pat, "I'll do attention, you do stand at ease." so I went out and did attention, he did stand at ease and this major come in and said, "You two come with me." Next minute I've got 17 platoon and he's got 16. We go back at lunch and how did these other guys go. They are going to run a, they are going to run a four day course with them. Because we knew one of the sergeants, he was a signal sergeant from

38:00 heavy radio, you know the radio with the big vans, he didn't remember anything from recruit training,

the blokes from mortar and so fourth they couldn't handle it and they couldn't do it. So we were stuck with it. And a lot of them were returned, you know instead of me finishing with the sergeant to run the platoon, the bloke that was going to be me was sent back to his unit, I bet he was happy about that, so that was Kapooka. It is hard work, it is long work. And I got home once during that time,

38:30 once that time I got the flu and was sick for three days, got on the train and went back.

So you were obviously aware of developments in Korea?

Oh yes.

Were you, were you like feeling that you wanted to be involved, even before it was, it came your way?

Yeah I don't know, I was always, I was being sent and I was going, that was the deal.

39:00 And that was the way I always saw it. I don't think soldiers got to pick and choose what they wanted to do ever.

If you had a choice would you?

I wouldn't have gone, no I wouldn't have gone. And when, and the week before I went the week finished. And I thought here it is a bloody waste going now so I roared round to the 2IC Major Grosvener and I said, "You know it is all finished and my wife is expecting." He said, "I will see what I can do for you." And that was in the morning and in the afternoon he called me back and said, "You are going on

39:30 Thursday which was two weeks before I was expected to go." So not only did they say I was going, they brought me forward a fortnight. So away I went, over to Japan, back to Hiro.

So how was, how was Moira about all that?

Not all that excited as you might imagine. Back to the old battery barracks as a mater of fact, it was the regiment I was holding in RHQ [Regimental Headquarters] as they called it. Did a week there and then up to the battle school at Haramua. And the battle school at Haramua was A, B and C company.

40:00 A were Australians, B were Brits and C were Canadians, because the commonwealth brigade was made up of those three. And there were specialist courses you could do sapper course, watercourse, Vickers course. So it was a four week and the four weeks I was there there were three killed and seven wounded. Bloody dangerous, you know, god.

How did that happen?

Oh two got blown up with a mortar, one bloke got blown up with explosives. The kid in my platoon I was running, he was doing

40:30 operation commonwealth and he got hit and fell over and I raced over and he had a bullet sticking out of him like a big thorn, because he had been hit by a spin cartridge that ricochet off the vicker, in there it was sticking in the shoulder flesh. Actually, the medical bloke arrived and pulled it out, but pad over it. So it was yeah.

Was that a bit disturbing, was that sort of the first time you really sort of been around and had people seriously wounded or killed?

Oh yeah yeah.

Did that have an impact?

Yes.

41:00 Be more careful. Because all the blokes it happened to you know if they had been doing the right thing it wouldn't have happened.

So what specifically was your roll through the training?

Running the platoon. Being the platoon, the platoon sergeant they called it, it was a, a bit of a ridiculous thing to call it. So we rolled out of there and came back to Hiro and came back to HR regiment for holding up on the Friday and sailed away on the Sunday on the Wei San for Pusan.

41:30 **And what was the strategy considering that the war was technically over, what what did they have in mind?**

They expected it to start again, that was the general feeling everywhere that the war would start again in a couple of months. If not a couple of weeks, that they would never hold the peace.

And what was your mood heading heading to Pusan?

Be very careful when I got there, because I knew the guys I was with I wasn't going to have I was going to move straight into a group of people that I didn't know.

42:00 And that is what happened I arrived there and fortunately

Tape 4

00:33 **Ok Don we've got to Pusan in Korea, can you take us through what happened to you from there?**

In Korea?

Yeah.

Well one, as I said I was a call convert, a lot of people were and what brought this on the army had about 19,000 people and we had old national service. So it was the 30 day thing or the 90 day thing, whatever it was

01:00 And there was something like 9 battalions of something like that around Australia. There were three battalions I think Puckapunyal, three at Ingleburn and Holsworthy and so on. So this took up an enormous amount of people. I suppose you are talking about 200, maybe 300 regulars running each show. Plus every CMF unit was so strong with reinforcements from this national service they had double the cadre staff they would normally have, sometimes three times the cadre staff.

01:30 And there were five artillery regiments in Sydney. So all this was eating people up. And then we had two battalions in Korea, one back in Australia, reinforcing and training to replace one of them, four battalions in Ingleburn training in reinforcements for 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. And I suppose a staff of 250 people in Japan at the headquarters. BCOF headquarters so they ran out of infantry soldiers. So people like me had to go. So I duly

02:00 arrived at 3 RAR area 6, north of the Imjin as we like to tell everybody.

No choice in that?

No choice in that. And I become the platoon sergeant of 11 platoon Don company, we hadn't become Delta company at that stage of the game, it was to come later. And my friend who come with me Col Spal became the platoon sergeant of, what did he have, 10, 10 platoon. And we settled into this, it was early autumn

02:30 and we were building the Kansas line, which is south of the Imjin river. And this was to be built a line of hills. And this is what stopped the Chinese push through Seoul. And the word was get all the steel pickets in before the end of autumn otherwise you won't get them in the ground. So we were putting other company areas on trucks about 6.30 in the morning, it was about a 45 minute run to the bottom of the hill, by the time we got to the hill it was 7.30, 7.45. And we worked

03:00 till dark, six days a week. And we might take a day off and do some training. Or we might take half a day off and do some, or we do some training out on the hill, keep our weapon skills up. But we worked very hard on this Kansas line and it was a big deal it was dig, big deep holes, the lentels that went across the front of the bunkers were a foot by a foot by ten foot long, had to be sandbagged, our platoon command post had 16 foot

03:30 of overhead cover over it. It was a very big deal and very hard work.

Were you involved in the actual the physical work or were you overseeing?

Oh yes, no no no, everybody had a shovel. And I was the platoon sergeant and had, the platoon commander was very good, I only had him for four months and he went off to run a night school, not battle school, you went to learn to fight by night to patrol by night because it was a skill we were loosing, so I took over platoon, platoon commander and had a platoon sergeant as one of my corporals.

04:00 At one stage of the game I was marking out my roll book doing a bit of administration one day while we were having lunch out on the hill and I found out of my three section commanders were all corporals, one was a RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] fitter and turner, one was an ordnance clerk and the other was a carpenter from engineers, so you could get anything fixed. And I think I only had a dozen infantry soldiers in my 30, 30 odd soldiers and they were all call converted. All the mortars were artillery, all the

04:30 anti tank were artillery all the Vickers were armour. All the signals were officer signals. And that was how the battalion ran and ran very well.

And your supplies, was it easy to get supplies?

Yes yes the only problem we had, helicopters were were coming into vogue as you see in mash but not to a great degree. So anything you got at the bottom of the road had to be carried to the tops of the hills. And that was a bit of a thing, we did have a bulldozer for a while to pull stuff up but eventually we decided it was probably easier to carry, it was harder but it was easier

05:00 because you actually carried it to the spot you wanted it. So we did that, and winter rolled on eventually, that slowed things down. We did a bit more training in winter in the snow.

What sort of training?

We had trouble, Australians had, out of all my platoon none of them had ever seen snow. So when it came time for real winter, we had a lot of trouble. Guys would go outside their, outside, our bunkers had heat, we made petrol heaters for them and when we were occupying the line which we would do for a couple of nights per week.

05:30 And one of them would go to pick up a jerry can of petrol to put back on the heater and not put his glove on and loose the skin off three fingers on the jerry can, so he'd be gone for a week then in hospital. I was losing, I was losing a soldier every four or five days to frostbite, for the first some weeks, until they come to grips with what was, what problem was, just bloody cold. It was Christmas day, we are not working and we are back in area 6 and we've got a couple of big squad tents

06:00 that have been into a mess thing and it has been sandbagged and stuff and they've got heaters, quite warm and the soldiers are sitting down for a very nice Christmas dinner because we've got we bought sort of tin plates and that. And the offers and sergeants are serving them, and it is quite a large door and we are walking past to go and serve their meal. And they are enjoying this. I walked past and looked out and it is snowing quite heavily. And I said to the 2IC "It is snowing." He said, "Don't tell the soldiers they will all won't to go and look." so we didn't tell them until it was all over. And then they went and looked. And it and it started snowing about midday

06:30 and it snowed for the next four days. And then we realised that no only it looks good but it is terribly, you can't move, you can't move stuff, you'd get out to the line, you'd go up the hill, and we would have to go up and clear snow first. Winter was, winter was very hard. Very hard, very hard work.

How did you counteract the frostbite, did you have to put out orders for..?

We had British winter issue, which was very good, much better than the Americans. Much better,

07:00 considered, consisted of two singlets that were made of, the string that the chemists used to have, that waxy string, made of that. And it is all based on the Eskimos and that would hold your woollen singlet on your body, allow the air to circulate and if you'd have your shirt over that, your big combat jacket over that, your combat jacket over that, you got woollen gloves and your gloves outer, and then you have gloves working, and you had long johns, big thick socks, WW boots with the big thick soles with no nails or anything in them,

07:30 cork, big cork sole. And and as long as you looked after yourself you were pretty warm, as long as you remembered what to do, as long as you remembered it was cold. But if you, if you went out without your jacket and you were going to be gone 20 minutes you had a problem straight away. And soldiers would get caught, they wouldn't think. I am in this nice warm building, I am just going round to get some more stores and bringing them back, and they would be gone 20 minutes, they've got a problem.

Were you relieved with guard duties during the night time given your position, did that mean that you didn't have

08:00 **to do that anymore?**

If if you were in the line you manned the command post. So we had two, I had a runner and a signaller and I trained them both to be sigs so there either be a platoon sergeant and a sig on it or me and a sig on, and we normally worked it, I tried to work it myself so I always did the midnight till dawn.

Why is that?

So I could kick them out of bed and make sure they were out of bed at dawn. And then when everyone was up and working and things were going well, I'd get a kip, a bit of a kip, but I'd always make sure they

08:30 were up first thing in the morning, make sure that the soldiers were rolling along. And they had things called Katcons, Koreans attached to the Commonwealth Division and we had two. Kim Dong Sik was one, and he was as tall as me. And of course my soldiers were telling me, "Who is your platoon sergeant?" "Don Donkin" And he had people convinced that it was a Korean running the platoon but anyhow, I had to make him stop doing that.

And what were they doing there the Katcons?

They

09:00 oh they attached them to see how we worked, to work with us, to learn from us and they were very good. They were our two were, I don't know if they are all but our two were very good. And we looked after them pretty well. One was in headquarters that used to help out with things, the other was in, one of the sections. And then we had, we had a, we had a spring came and they decided that there would be a commonwealth division advanced to encounter which is quite spectacular for a

09:30 soldier. I never saw a division, so we are all withdrawn from the line and the American marine brigade regiment came in to open the Canadians in the line and we have all gone back 20 mile and we are going

to advance back to the Kansas line. And our brigade, the 28 brigade were the lead brigade and we were sent off and three battalions were the lead battalions and Don company would be the lead company and 11 platoon would be the lead platoon of the D company. So at dawn we step over the white line

- 10:00 and start off for our advance and we marched and went forward in patrol formation up side of hills for about three hours and we came to a hill, and we were told to dig in there and we dug in there and stayed for five days and didn't move again. And the whole division went past us. It was spectacular.

Can you describe it?

Regiments and armoured regiments, the commonwealth division had ten battalions instead of 9 because there was two Brit and two Australian in our brigade that gave them an extra one thousand men straight away. It had three artillery regiments, the Canadians, the Brits and the New Zealanders.

- 10:30 Had two armoured regiments, the Canadians and the Brits. Had a the battleaxe regiment had 5.5 they were medium guns it had a 40mm battery and then it had engineers and ROOC [?] and the hospital nearest to us was NORMASH [Norwegian Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] the Norwegian medical hospital. It was run by Norway, the Norwegians. I think the count was in the commonwealth division there were about 28,000 people, enormous division.

- 11:00 They did everything.

Which hospital, did the Australian's have their own hospital or did you?

Yes they did, it was a field ambulance in actual fact which is a mini ford hospital and if you had something surgical it would you would go to NORMASH and from that you would move back to the next hospital. And then eventually the main base hospital was back in Kure.

So there would have been frostbite that most people were going to the hospital?

Yeah frostbite mostly. Haemorrhagic fever was a bit of a scare earlier on, that was the from the mites off rats.

What was it called?

Haemorrhagic fever.

- 11:30 And a Australian doctor and a Canadian doctor they sort of come up with a, said you know it was a vitamin thing and people were dying from it and they started people with fruit juice, only pure fruit juice. And it brought a few, they actually saved a few lives with that.

What was the symptoms of that fever?

A rash, a bad rash, bad itching, small sores breaking out and like having severe, very severe flu, flu symptoms. But it came

- 12:00 off the rats. So what you had to do was not only have these beaut trenches and whatever, they had to be very clean. And some countries their battalions weren't all that clean and they weren't Brits or Australians.

Americans?

No no the 22 Vandoos, the French Canadian. We took over their company, or their battalion area, well their company area for a week once and it was absolutely appalling.

And they were getting more sick than anyone else were they?

I never asked, I didn't

- 12:30 we did it for a week and then got out of there and never went back. No they, the problem is in winter, in severe winter people can be a bit lapsed with their general hygiene, come spring you know it, that is the problem yeah.

So it wasn't just the Australians working on the Kansas line it was the entire commonwealth?

Yep, we had, what was known as the Losen's feature that was two companies forward and our two companies back behind them. And to our left were 27 brigade with the

- 13:00 Brits and to our right was the other battalions and forward of, forward of the line were the, the Imjin was the 28th the 25th brigade which was the Canadians.

Did you mix well with the other brigades or?

Yeah we'd see a fair bit of them. Our RSM had been, our RSM, Morrie Armstrong had been a captain as adjutant of the Warwicks when they landed D Day, he was in England and joined the Australian army and they kept him in England during the war and he was with the Warwicks.

- 13:30 And they were actually in, in Korea when we were there and their RSM had been one of their sergeants, which was quite extraordinary, no we got on well. Yeah.

So the morale was good?

Yeah we were looked after well, we were clothed well, we were fed well, we worked hard.

Did you see any action or did you encounter any problems?

We went out on patrols, we patrolled from, because area 6 was north we patrol, we do skunk patrols as they were termed they were going out to people hiding up and

- 14:00 mainly the steel I guess, and then north of the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone] is not what it is now, it wasn't cleared as well or to find as well, but no we would go out occasionally and fired a few shots here and a few there but nothing desperate.

Why was it called skunk patrol?

Oh I guess because if you got near to anyone out there you could smell them. Yeah at the end of summer, to go, to be out, to be out on some sort of training and actually march down through a Korean village in

- 14:30 summer was an experience in itself. Now we'd go right round the side of the hill to add 20 minutes to the movement to avoid going through the village.

Just because of the smell?

Well they do this cabbage in jars, which isn't all that great, yes. It is hot, their hygiene is not the greatest.

Did you mix with the Koreans at all did you get to talk to?

No apart from Katcons I don't think I spoke to the Koreans.

Did you have much an idea of what the

- 15:00 **situation was politically at that point because you mentioned that the people thought the war was going to begin again?**

Oh yes. They kept you right up to date, we knew what was happening. How it was going, there were a couple, a couple of instances where they'd stand to. There'd be a red alert, if there was sort of an orange alert you it was a training run, and if it came out red alert, red alert, not training, not training, not training. And it just meant when you pulled out you took more ammunition. We if it was training

- 15:30 you know we didn't take a lot, you didn't take anything because we were forward of the Imjin if we pulled back and the trucks and we would throw stuff on it and we would go. And your extra clothing whatever whatever you just left it. And we left an NCO and six behind and if the word came they'd burn it.

Did you have any of those red alerts while you were there?

Oh yeah, they'd come on sort of a week or twice a week or once a fortnight or whatever.

Did you have any idea that there was going to be a war, the war was going to start up again or

- 16:00 **how the peace negotiations were going?**

As far as we knew the peace negotiations seemed to be a waste of time. Which of course they were because we were still at war. I mean it never solved the problem and we, if you were arguing about the size of the flags on the height of the size of the flags on the table, it wouldn't take much to start it again would it? And they were the debate on the height of the flags on the table went on for some weeks. And we knew all this, we were told all this, yeah we were ready to go.

- 16:30 **Who told you, was that through?**

Oh it come out, it come out in reports, battalion issue releases or we would just read it in the papers, we used to get the Stars and Stripes paper, and the other, the other information was the padre of 3 RAR was Father Joe Phillips and he would do a, do a mass for two companies, and then next weekend he would do another two companies. And of course when he come round to your company he did a mass and if you had a hundred men in the company 80 would go. Now they couldn't all possibly be Catholics.

- 17:00 But when you went in he would give you a foolscap page or maybe two and on the would sort of be the sermon for the day and on the back would be all sporting results for Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, the football and the races and so forth and and he would get it from the ABC that night, type it onto his skin and then do it on one of those wax printers. And you know he'd do 60, 70 copies.

What a great idea?

Yeah he got them all in the church. He was a good man Joe a good man.

Did you get letters from Moira at that time, was there communication

- 17:30 **between the two of you?**

Communication was good, if you sent a telegram you sent, you know sergeant Donkin 248692 I love you. And of course this is the 80 odd phrases you can use to send a telegram, you can pick out the numbers out you want. So it was, Col Spal's platoon was out they were doing something in area 6 and I come back, It was just on dark and it was raining and miserable and he came running down the road waving a telegram. Oh gee.

- 18:00 And I opened it and it was from my mother, it said, Moira has gone to hospital, which wasn't what I expected so a day later I got another telegram saying I was a father of a son.

How did that make you feel given that you were that far away?

Very sad. Very sad, I felt like I missed something vital in my life. But my platoon, my platoon were absolutely terribly excited about it all, they were a good mob. But I, I was excited, and while I was there my grandfather

- 18:30 died too and I was a bit sad about that, but that was sometime before.

That must be one of the hardest things about army life is it, to just be away from the people you care about in those crucial times?

It is it is, but it is the life. I guess you don't join the army over the air force for a job, you join it for a way of life and if you don't like the way of life you really should get out of it.

- 19:00 And I've seen so many guys hang onto it and they should really have given up, gone away, found something else to do. As they say you have got to do the good and the bad, unfortunately there is probably a bit more bad than there is good, but anyhow. No I was very sad about it, Moira sent me photos and she wrote me letters. I didn't, I didn't get to see this little bloke at all until he was about one years, two weeks short of his birthday.

- 19:30 **So you were in Korea for another?**

When I came out of Korea I sort of came out into the back regiment holding unit and they suddenly said we are sending you to Haramura as an instructor. And I whinged wined and waved my arms and carried on stamped my foot. And they said, "Alright you're a sergeant in charge of the holding platoon, and the holding platoon is you are holding people that are going home or that are not going home." And I went to the holding platoon and checked a dozen of guys, and I thought I will give this a couple of days and I'll whinge and wine again. And I went back the next day and there were 40 odd guys in it.

- 20:00 The next day was 60.

Whereabouts?

Back in Hiro

Oh Hiro.

And what you do is kick these blokes out of bed and get them up and organised in the morning get them out to breakfast, get them dressed, get their towel and their little haversack and their costume, because it is summer now. And we'd march the hours out, march them out through the garter tunnel to the little pebble beach in the bay, and they would swim and lay around there until about 2.30 in the afternoon and I would kick them all onto their feet again and march them back in. All I did was take them out of barracks. I did this for about four or five days. And I was

- 20:30 going nowhere so I just got rid of these guys about 3.30 in the afternoon and I looked across and there was Father Joe Philips walking across towards the administration pole. I ran after him I said, "I have this big problem." "What is it?" I said, "If I don't get home very very soon I am going to miss my son's 1st birthday." "Oh." he said. "Well I don't know if I can do anything about that sergeant." So he disappeared and I went and had a shower and got changed and I was coming over to dinner and the, the order room sergeant said, "You right have you been checked off, you have checked your stuff in?"

- 21:00 I said, "Why's this?" "You are leaving tomorrow morning." It took me about ten minutes to get checked out and checked off and the next morning I joined a bus, a small bus which took us to Iwakuni which is about 2 hour drive away. And that afternoon I flew out on a, I grew up with Qantas, I flew out on a constellation the twin tripletail thing. And of course when you fly you didn't fly straight to Australia, you flew from Iwakuni to

- 21:30 Guam. You overnighted at Guam and then you flew to Port Moresby where the Red Cross ladies met every plane and fed you breakfast and had towels and razors and things, they had built a special shower block at the airport for servicemen, and they met every plane, unbelievable. And back on the plane and home. Landed at Mascot, met Moira for about five minutes or so, into a bus, into Marrickville to the LTD had to go

- 22:00 through a transit depot. Got checked in there outside, met Moira, sat in the car, nursed Chris on the way home. Got home here.

That must have been amazing to see your son?

It was, went back next morning, got a leave pass, got some money, come home. And I think I had about 30 days leave and we did some things we had to do here and then we rang up and booked a cottage at

Katoomba. Packed our little suitcases.

22:30 And made it on the ferry over to Central station and got on the train and went to Katoomba for three weeks, just the three of us, it was great, really great.

Was it hard for you to adjust after being in Korea in the cold conditions and doing what you were doing and to being a father?

You just spent, you've just spent, well you spent one year doing nothing else but mind 40 soldiers. 40 adult grown soldiers and suddenly you have a little tiny boy.

23:00 Yeah. It does yeah. Got to turn your priorities around dramatically, think differently. Yeah it took a bit of sorting. Well it didn't take sorting, Moira made she would pack us up and send us off together, you two go and bet the papers, you two go and do this, you two go and do that. So we two off we would go yeah.

If you hadn't had become a father, would it be at all possible for you to spend another couple of years in Korea or

23:30 **they didn't have a cut off time?**

No you did your tour, I could have stayed there at Haramura probably for another six months or eight months but the majority, but they generally didn't like to leave you over 18 months if you were in the battalions and things. People that were in headquarters in Kure, some of them had been there four or five years. Had married Japanese girls, had families and brought them home. A friend of mine Doc Wesley he went back to hospital, he was a medical guy, he had been a medic corporal in the battalion in Kapyong as a matter of fact and he came back to the hospital, he worked in the hospital

24:00 and he met his wife who was working in the hospital in the administration staff, she spoke English and she was an interpreter for the staff and they live just up in Frenchs Forrest.

How would a marriage between say a Japanese women and a soldier be received at that time?

It was very difficult, the army made it as difficult as possible. Which I thought, but they did, back here I don't think it was a problem at all. I don't think that Doc never had,

24:30 and his nickname was Doc because he was a medical guy. I don't think he had any problem at all he and his wife. He got out of the army and went to taxation office and after some years in the taxation office became a taxation consultant. And he did our tax for a number of years as a matter of fact.

Georges, you went back to Georges Heights, when you got back?

Came back from Korea went to Georges Heights, finished my leave, kept my bit for Christmas because I was back in

25:00 October. So I kept a couple of weeks for Christmas as well, milked the chain as hard as I could and got back to Georges Heights and we were only, we had to go away for a couple of days at Holsworthy and went on Christmas leave in '54 was over and we were into '55. And we started off and in the first couple of weeks I was called into the office and they said, "You are now the troops major of baker troop, you are a warrant officer." So I

25:30 had been promoted again.

How did that make you feel?

Very good. Very good, the money was quite good too, a big step in pay. And I was doing that and they were forming the first battery to go to Malaya 105 Battery.

Just before we go there can I ask you a question about Georges Heights, there was a change at Georges Heights and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] had taken over when you came back?

No the RAAF had a listening station there, the thing that went round and round and round at the end of the playground and they had a dozen air force blokes there that manned it.

Was that, did that cause some kind of problem or tension

26:00 **there?**

No. Not at all. It didn't go all the time, they only sort of work, it was a surveillance for god knows what and they only worked about three or four hours a day and not weekends. And 105 Battery was gearing up to go to Malaya and they were, the names were coming out the people that were going, and the list of people to go came out and one of the Sergeant Major said, "Where are you going Warrant Officer Donkin?" So I said to somebody

26:30 in power I said, "I am going away." "Yes yes but we expect the wives to be able to go up after six or eight months."

To Malaya?

To Malaya, "But you will be there for about six months there without your wife but she will be able to

come up then”.

What year are we in now?

55.

55 still.

So I got back from Korea in October 54. And they said, “Don’t you want to go” and I said, “No I don’t.” so they said “Alright.” and they took me off the list. And 105 Battery went off without us. And it turned out that those that went up actually,

27:00 one of my friends went up, he was only there for a couple of months he went out and rented private accommodation, sergeant, brought his wife and the army sent his wife up, the army was never quite right again but, we didn’t want to go.

Moir didn’t want to go?

We had her Mum was very very sick by that stage of the game, she couldn’t possibly have left her, couldn’t possibly. So there we were and we were rolling through 55,

27:30 doing a couple of courses. Did a warrant officer gunnery course, did a couple of other courses, did another PT course, went to Holsworthy shooting, went to Singleton shooting, went to Tanjara shooting. There is a thing go to Tanjara, it has got to be the worst piece of country in the world and we’d always go in the middle of winter. So it would snow.

Where is Tanjara?

As you go down the south coast road, you go past Nowra and you come to a little town called Bomaderry

28:00 you turn right off the main road onto the dirt road at Bombaderry and if you keep going on the dirt road it will bring you out at Braidwood, Tanjara is about ½ an hour along it. And it is rough country and nasty. And we would do that, nobody was pleased about going to Tanjara. And

And the PT course had that improved from the earlier PT courses?

It had yeah. Yeah battle PT was the big thing now. Which is, you haven’t got to be able to swing on the Roman

28:30 rings in battle PT it was stab and joke and drop people mainly.

So it was more practical?

Yeah.

Much more, and was this the time when they were still using British PT teachers?

No they had all gone, by the mid 50s they were moving on, they moved them away. And life was pretty good, I used to go home come in and. And Wendy arrived at that time.

Your second?

Second. And

29:00 it was 1957 and 105 Battery would be coming home in a couple of months and A Battery would be going. And I was the BSM of A Battery at the time. And there was a great flurry of people, national service had come to a crushing halt, we had about, the figure I saw we had about 350 more sergeants than we needed and about a hundred warrant officers, because we had promoted them all for national service and for this extra service and now that ceased to exist. And now we had

29:30 an abundance of NCOs and particularly sergeants and warrant officers, they were everywhere. And it was at the same time the WRAACS [Womens’ Royal Australian Army Corps], the WRAACS were going to move from down in Victoria and they were going to move the WRAACS to Georges Heights and we would move into Holsworthy, the old barracks occupied by 12 battalion national service. And when we arrived there you could see the last two weeks they had national service their only claim to fame was to wreck the barracks before we got there, and they almost exceeded. But we were very cranky

30:00 about moving from Georges Heights to Holsworthy there is just no comparison. The soldiers were very angry, some probably never spoke to another female soldier for the rest of their lives. So we moved. And 105 came in and I was told I wouldn’t be going with A Battery to Malaya, not that they ever said I was going but one of the more senior warrant offices that had been hiding somewhere in South Australia was going to go. And these guys were appearing all over the place. One out at Holsworthy

30:30 one day. 22 sergeants marched in from Puckapunyal, all gunners, 22 sergeants and the next day only three of them were still sergeants the rest were bombardiers.

How did the army organise this process how did they tell people that suddenly they had lost their...?

Badly is the word you are looking for, yeah very badly, very very badly. They should have started pruning back the year before, but they didn't, they did it all over night.

So what did they just tell the people turning up for work and they would tell them that's it?

31:00 Yeah and you were, we started having, I went down and took over BSM what they call left battery, so right battery got four more mortars and they said, "Oh there is a group of 30 soldiers coming in from North Head." and they did. And there was another group of 25 soldiers and they arrived and they were half engineers, half ordnance people, that were found to be surplus their establishments and they were converting to gunners and god they were so pleased about it, you have no idea. You know these guys had been an advanced corporal storeman packer and now he is a gunner lifter pusher,

31:30 not happy, not a happy army at all. So all this is going pretty badly and I wasn't a standard warrant officer, although I had all my qualifications, I had passed all of my courses. Because of the backlog of warrant officers they weren't making anyone sub stan [substantive, i.e. permanent, not temporary]. So my CO fellow by the name of Colonel Howard called me in and said, "They are going to release you to sergeant." I said, "Are they?" He said, "Yep where do you want to go?" and I said, "North Head." how good is that. He said, "You've got to go by November

32:00 and by November I'll be the director of artillery." So on 11th November Armistice Day I reported in at North Head as a sergeant and he was then the director of artillery to find there was no establishment at North Head for a sergeant.

Just before, before we talk about that I just wanted to ask you a question or two about national service, you said it was being phased out, what was your personal opinion of that, was that a good idea?

It was a waste of time to start with you know.

32:30 90 days of training, then they cut it back to 72, enough time to have three gymkhana, four parades and do your boots up then go out to a CMF unit at Dee Why, anti air craft, yeah I think they had anti aircraft, that had three times the soldiers you were entitled to and you went in for your weekend camp. They didn't know if you were there or not, we had young guys in the surf club that would appear, sign off their name and come back to the beach. Absolute waste of time, badly run, badly financed, badly organised.

33:00 **So it was long overdue when it was being phased out?**

Yeah produced, produced nothing. The only way you can have national service is it has got to be for a year, I always thought fifteen months, three months of training and a year in a unit. Was the way to go. Nothing less than that, anything less than that is a waste of time.

And did a lot of people just quit when they, when they got demoted, and that was the idea, did anyone, were they told just to go or did they just demote people?

Yeah, Yeah. Got demoted, I went out

33:30 "Ok." Go to the personnel, out you go.

Were people getting paid out was anything like that happening or was that it?

No no no. There was no bonus no nothing like that. So I appeared at the school, I was only there two weeks and they got an amendment to the establishment for one sergeant. Now what was really upsetting was I was there for 2 ½ years as a sergeant. And for about 20 months of that time I was the acting warrant officer, getting high duty allowance for a warrant officer as the training WOF [Warrant Officer 1st Class], as

34:00 the training co-ord. So there was a vacancy there but they wouldn't promote anyone into it.

What was your role there, what were you actually doing on a day to day basis?

I was an instructor, I was an instructor in the regimental training, I was an instructor, but after six or seven months I took over as the training co-ord, co-ordinated training as a warrant officer.

Did you enjoy it?

Yeah I, North Head, Curl Curl, the connection was enormous. So I stayed there until 1960, ran the rugby union team, which I enjoyed,

34:30 coached and captained the rugby side. Coached and captained the basketball side. Yeah life was good there, got home every night. So another one arrived, and the house was getting, we were talking about extensions, and the house started to grow as the family started to grow. And I was very relaxed and come to the middle of 1960 someone said "Oh you have been promoted to warrant officer and sent back as a TSM [Team Sergeant Major] in 102 Battery at Holsworthy." and I suppose I should have

35:00 rejoiced and cheered but I didn't at all. If they had of said, "We've changed our mind we are going to leave you here as a sergeant." I would have stayed.

Really?

Happily yeah.

So you would be closer to home?

Oh life was very good there, very good, we knew what we were doing and I got a duty once a fortnight or something. So in 1960 I rolled down to Holsworthy, took over as troop major 102 Battery and we just started these wonderful exercises called nut cracker and ice breaker and they were in the Colo Putty

35:30 Ranges. Do you know where the Colo Putty Road is?

No.

It runs from sort of Richmond through to Singleton, the back road. Terrible road, it is to be avoided, well west of that is the Colo Putty ranges, really wild tough country and we decided we would go there. And the army just changed, the Americans had brought in a pentropic division, instead of having one thousand men in it, it had 1,800 men in it. Commanded by you know more soldiers more vicker companies bigger than

36:00 and they tested it out with three divisions for about a year and found out it wouldn't work and as they disbanded the idea we started it. We formed a pentropic battalion and we exercised it in the Colo Putty Ranges. So off from, off from Holsworthy, we went to our old regiment to support this pentropic division and it was enormous, enormous, they had more drivers than I had, than we had in our battery.

Did it work?

No, because it was too big for the, in the desert, it would work in Iraq I guess but it wouldn't work in our country,

36:30 keep losing companies the area wasn't big enough. And they gave it all away after that exercise and the next one was, was, the next one was the icebreaker and the next one the following year was nutcracker, but they were the highlights a fair bit of shooting, fair bit of, and I used to live there a couple of nights a week because it was too difficult to get home. I would go in say Mondays, Tuesdays, I would get home Wednesdays because I would play football or something if I was going to be in Sydney. I would probably stay Thursday nights and come home Friday.

37:00 So that wasn't good. And we were doing an airport ability thing, where we were going to fly a gun in and land it in the demonstration at Williamtown, fly out to Richmond and we were going to land and this gunner was going to drop the door and by the time we got the door down the chain would be undone and we would run out screaming where do we fire next, everyone would be terribly impressed with all this. And we did that and when we come to get back, to put the gun back on the plane to fly back to Richmond, they'd say "Oh we are going to use your plane to fly the VIPs back because the other one has broken down."

37:30 So I thought it will be a quick decision here Don, round to the PO, fill the truck up and we are driving back, so we drove back and we got in about oh the early hours of the morning. And we were just getting the stores unpacked and things and the orderly went past and he said, "The word is go home now." So they ran us to East Hills station, jumped on the train, flashed home and got home in time to take Moira to the hospital.

Number 4?

Yeah yeah. Yes.

38:00 Actually I made it with a bit of grace that time. A bit different.

So what year are we in now?

1960, we are 1963 we are getting into, we finished 1962. 63 is going to be much the same. Going to be the troops sergeant major of 102 Battery, might have been BSM by the end of the year because the BS was going and they are looking at me. And I come back to do another PT course. For no other reason

38:30 than six weeks I will be near home. So I duly arrived back at North Head and they were doing this you beaut PT course and I get this call to go down to see the 2I, the second in command. And I went down and he had this little bit of paper. "WO Don. Vietnam. October." That is all it said. I rang up the adjutant and he said, "That's all we know." So I finished the PT course, got back to Holsworthy and a week later I was on my way to Canungra.

What was Moira's reaction to the fact that?

39:00 Good god. Where is Vietnam, it is the same place as Indochina. Up to Canungra.

What was your reaction?

Good god, where is, but I knew a bit about it, I knew what the first Team had done, and we had one Team over there and they had been there about seven or eight months by then, eight months, ten months, ten months. I had a faint idea what was going on. Not a great idea but a faint idea.

What was that, what kind of idea did you have at that stage?

39:30 I would be an advisor to training, I would be in the training side and I would be an advisor. Which you know would be alright, wasn't too bad.

What about the situation there did you have much of an idea what was going on?

Yeah well the war hadn't cranked up then, in actual fact when we got there they were sort of winning the war, well most people thought they were, so we got to Canungra and had a miserable, Canungra wasn't a joyful place, spent four weeks there, come out of that.

This is your jungle training?

Yes.

40:00 Yes.

What was?

Oh they call it rainforest training now, there is no more swamps, there is only wetlands.

So what did you learn that you didn't know before there?

Nothing at all. And I was a section commander, and in my section was a major and three captains, all good guys. And we.

Did they tell you what to expect there, did they give you...?

Yeah we had briefings and things, got to fly in helicopters and small planes and look out, look

40:30 through the jungle and get lost, and all that sort, all that good stuff.

And did they give you a fair idea of what to expect or?

Yep yep we had a good idea. And we finished there on the Thursday, got the train home that night, got home Friday. Took Moira out to dinner that night, came home she washed all my greens, dried them, ironed them Saturday and put me on a train for Melbourne Saturday night. So I was home the one night, got to Melbourne Sunday morning.

41:00 Hung around there for about two hours and finally a guy pulled up in a bus and said, "Get aboard here." Me and 30 others and we climb on this bus.

Who are you with?

All the group that went to Canungra. Oh less a couple.

What did they, who were they, what did they...?

Oh the people, the people that were picked, selected, different cause, different reasons. There had been a couple farmed out that hadn't gone on. And this bus drove down to Swan Island, which is right at the mouth of Port Phillip. And they unloaded all our

41:30 gear out near middle harbour and the bloke said, "Wait here." and drove the bus away and left us. So we walked over and looked at a couple of mini vans and said, "Whoever can drive get in one of these and drive back down the road." So I got in one and we drove back down the road and the bloke stepped out and said, "Stop here." and made us go in here and we went in and there was a little buffet dinner organised for us. And we were showed where to, where we'd billet, it was the old barracks for the coast artillery of Swan Island. And we settled in and next morning we got up and lecture would start at

42:00 8 o'clock, and the first lecture was insurgency, anti terrorism.

Tape 5

00:31 **Don could you tell us about your experiences at Swan Island please?**

It was a, they ran courses there, back in those days it was a secret, now it's not of course, and you went there and you were hand picked and they wanted a group of warrant officers to do the course. And because we were the obvious, the obvious group, not so much because we were going to Vietnam but because they needed a group of people to go through it. And

01:00 the aim of the course is you become a liaison officer to a guerrilla group. Someone parachutes you into somewhere and you become the liaison between there and whatever. So interesting, different, really really different, some funny things.

Did this course take you by surprise that suddenly you were being thrown into this world?

Yes well they really, they'd say, "What is happening at Swan Island?" I'd go "Oh." so you knew it was

different. We did all sorts of things, we did surveillance, and they shot us out of

- 01:30 cameras in the backs of vehicles doing surveillance and the guys were doing the follow up across the other road, following this guy up and this very pretty girl walked passed and he turned to look at her, looked back and the guy is gone. They've got this on film, hilarious. We are doing a thing a blind house, a blind drop, a blind pick up, or blind drop as they call it, safe house and it be passed on and my pick up point was the second toilet in the park at Geelong. What they
- 02:00 hadn't found out was at 6 o'clock they close the gate. There is only the first toilet that is open, so I've got to climb over the wire gate, behind the cistern, get my note that tells me where to go and I am climbing back over the gate and two blokes walk in, "Oh I got locked in." you know. So we've got to kill an hour. So the pubs stay open I think, stay open to 6.30. So I walked into this little saloon bar of this pub this small bar. And I am standing there with these two other guys standing, not talking but just standing apart "A beer please" the barman got my beer
- 02:30 looked at me, looked at the other two, "Oh you guys from Queensland." we've all got suntans, because it is the middle of winter. Oh very secret stuff.

What is a blind drop?

Oh it is a note where to go to, to the safe house and picked up there and then by a fisherman going off to blow up the powerhouse at Geelong, the watchman was really cranky about it when he found we were trying to blow it up. Slabs of flour, self raising flour. I learnt how to blow up a ship with self raising

- 03:00 flour. That was interesting and lots of other things, learnt how to do things and whatever. Finished that.

So how many blokes did you go through that course with?

30 about 30 odd, half warrant officers, half officers.

And you were aware that there was this mystery course going on, had you got wind of it prior to your involvement?

Yeah we knew we were going down to this mystery course. If anybody finds out you've got to kill them.

So you had to, you had to be completely hush hush about it?

Yeah.

- 03:30 Yeah, Moira knew I was in Melbourne, but she didn't know what I was doing.

Was that officially on your military record?

No, no it isn't, not on anybody's.

Did that awaken an interest in that level of operation for you?

No I, I didn't, I didn't, that was me. And certainly when I found out the Special Forces was run by the CIA or CSG, Combined Studies Group. Worked out to be a white building

- 04:00 in Da Nang which everybody called the white elephant. You know it was, things like that, and the guy used to fly in a heliotor, that is a plane with an enormous plane front engine you can adjust in the floral shirt, khaki boots, and a pistol and leave you a bag of money, it was not my go at all.

It wasn't your world?

No not at all.

So how long was that Swan Island course?

Four weeks, four weeks.

And what was next for you then?

- 04:30 Came back to the regiment and then I had to go to the School of Military Intelligence. That is a miss naming of words but anyhow, at Middle Head. Where we did 2 ½ weeks of briefing and sort of map, map exercises, what we'd do and what we wouldn't do and so forth.

So that was specifically geared towards Vietnam?

Training Team yeah. It was a Training Team course, finished that, reported back to the regiment and I reported back to the regiment on the Monday and the regiment was

- 05:00 packing up to go to Tanjara and I had just been informed I wasn't going to Vietnam in October, I was now going on the 1st of July which was in a week or so's time.

Did you feel that that course at Middle Head had tuned you adequately into the whole situation of the war in Vietnam and were you feeling relatively prepared?

The guys, the guys, a guy had just come back from the first Team and he did some of the briefing. A lot of the briefing was

05:30 based on the French experience and that wasn't really much value. But we knew where we'd be and who we'd be and what we'd be and what we could expect from the soldiers, yeah it was good stuff.

And did you get much of an insight into the way the Viet Cong were fighting the war over there and the jungle conditions and those sorts of tin tacts?

We understood a lot of our guerrilla warfare from Malaya. I mean

06:00 the blue books the Brits wrote from Malaya was all you needed, you didn't want anything the Americans had. Probably the big mistake the Americans made was trying to follow the blue book and they couldn't understand Malaya was a peninsula surrounded by the Commonwealth fleets with a small border in Thailand. And everybody in Malaya that did any sort of job was trained by the British, the postman, the train driver, whoever, so they had tremendous control. Where in Vietnam they had a border on three countries, an enormous coastline.

06:30 The Annamite chain starting just outside of Saigon and running into Mt Everest, seventeen ethnic groups and they didn't understand the control of what was needed and or how. In Malaya they had a thing called hamlets they formed secure hamlets, safe hamlets and they moved them to where, to where they would be safe and under protection, moved the people and put them in good housing. The

07:00 Vietnamese just put a fence round the one they had. And the one at Hiep Khahn was two mile long by a mile wide. You'd need a battalion to defend it and they had 30 guys.

Can you tell us more about the blue book?

It it, it was, after the first three years in Malaya, I can't think of his name now, not Templer, Templer, Templer. He was the guy put in charge and he went there and he said, "This is the way it has got to be, no weapons,

07:30 no ammunition, no this, no that." The bank manager got a year in jail for leaving his pistol on the front seat of his car in Kuala Lumpur. The oil tapper was going out of the day doing their oil tapping and taking tins of sardines and things of out would have the tin pierced by the security people so they'd have to eat it that day, they could only take enough rice for that day. The CTs were, the Communist terrorists they were starving in the jungle. We had control of the

08:00 roads, the rail, our air force used to go and bomb anything that looked like a farm, dropping you know large bombs on potato patches. And they wilted on the vine, you know it died.

And so did the blue book outline these techniques and ideas?

Yes how to do it. They had a technique going there where they formed the, the race system in Malaya is very good and they formed fast cars, fast protective cars, where they'd roar into the village, kick down the door,

08:30 seize the guy and take him away. He was a known collaborator. And the Americans were in the Phoenix campaign were going to do the same thing, but whose door do you knock down, do you really knock down the Mayor's doors because he was a collaborator and he probably was. So that the Phoenix thing probably caught more wrong people than right people.

So the blue book was a good thing for the Australians to consult before they went to Vietnam?

Yeah, yeah but as long as you adjusted it to the

09:00 Vietnam set up. You couldn't take it and use it completely, watch you needed a bloody green book Vietnam, write another one.

But the Americans did access the book as well?

Yes they did. They thought it was the bible. Unfortunately it wasn't. The government in Malaya was British hand picked, ran well, no corruption. The American government in Saigon was American picked and full of corruption.

09:30 So there was a major problem, and the Buddhists of course were cranky with the Catholics because the Catholics ran all the school and universities and things and the Buddhists couldn't get into it, apart from the Communists.

So what was some of the other areas that was covered in that briefing of Middle Head?

Oh they did a bit on language, and they gave us a book on customs, and wherever you go you know they will come through, these people will be deeply offended if do this and do that and most cases

10:00 people were not offended at all because they had forgotten the customs a hundred years ago anyhow. That sort of thing, it was alright. And it was near Manly, which was a good point. So when I got back to the regiment I found out I was going pretty early, the regiment was going to Tanjara, the adjutant who was an old friend of mine said, "You are not going to Tanjara you are going on four days leave." So I got taken my pre-em [pre-embarkation] leave and he said, "Go another four days." So away I went. Came home to Moira, we went over to the airport

10:30 late one afternoon. I was met by a major, I had to be in civvies [civilian clothing], it was a Saturday. I got on a plane and flew with this special issue of gear. I got all this extra gear to take, and the day before I am going they ring me from South Head which is now the personnel depot, I haven't completed my issue, so I drive from here round to South Head in the morning. And they give me two metal Australians [badges] and a pair of tropical pyjamas; I must have fifty sets of.

11:00 When I sort of stopped the steam coming from my ears and went straight back home again. Got over there major saw me onto the plane, said goodbye to Moira and the kids.

How was Moira coping?

Moira, Moira regards to what she will tell you she is very much a soldier's wife and she knows. Flew to Singapore got there on a. Why they flew me out on a Saturday god only knows because you fly to

11:30 Singapore and you get to far off headquarters and nobody worked there on a Saturday night and absolutely nobody is working there on Sunday. So you spend Sunday just sitting around.

Was it a solely military flight that you are on?

No it is civil. And on the Monday there was a bit of a briefing when I would be going out in three days time and then they issued me with a complete British issue, or the Australian issue for service in Malaya, which had another two kit bags to the kit bags and suitcase I had already. And

12:00 then I flew out to Saigon, I arrived in Saigon, I was there three or four days I think. And I did three days going to the University of Saigon where a professor in taught me Vietnamese in three days, and I also got issued with, a complete American issue for Vietnam. At this stage of the game I would need a small truck to move at any given time. So the last thing I did at the Australian headquarters in the

12:30 MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] building was sort through my gear and I left half of it behind on the floor of the orderly room. Steel helmet, four belts the pack this and that and the other thing.

So you chose bits and pieces from the various options?

Yeah took the American jacket which were good, took our trousers, took our boots which were better than theirs, went to the armoury got a pistol, got a 9mm carbine which was light and good and had a banana

13:00 mag of thirty rounds.

So it wasn't necessary for everyone to have the same combination?

Not at all.

It is up to you, you can improvise and throw whatever you wanted to from what they gave you?

Picked my stuff, left the other stuff on the floor. Got into a plane, onto a 123 provider, it is sort of a small herk. Flew to Pho Bi airport, which is just outside of Hue and was met by two, two of the officers from Hiep Khanh.

What was your state of mind on arrival, how were you feeling about

13:30 **the whole business of being there now?**

Challenged. Interest, soldiers, lots of soldiers about everywhere.

So you weren't resenting the fact that you had been separated from your family again, you were feeling like getting stuck into the work?

Regular soldier. Got to Hiep Khanh, Hiep Khanh was a very good set up, it was very comfortable, we had rooms with sort of fly wire half way up the wall to the ceiling

14:00 and ceiling fans and big generator generating power for us. Mess hall, bar, they bought an air conditioner and put it in the bar. It was the only air-conditioned bar north of Hue I was told and I believed them. Big fence round it. The only duty we pulled was two guys at night stayed up and kept an eye on things and general around the compound. And next to us was the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] compound, which probably had about three hundred soldiers in it. And we trained civil guard, civil guard

14:30 were CMF only local, the civil guard company at such and such a town perhaps guarded the bridge and there'd be forty or fifty of them. And we were retrained they'd come.

So they'd be local villages?

Village, And they'd come to us and we, we trained them for four weeks. And that was alright, and we put them on, we had a rifle range where we'd shoot them and we'd go out and do little minor manoeuvres for them and we'd teach them about jungle warfare and tricks. The problem was they, one company I was

- 15:00 you would be put in charge of managing a company and the first one I had had sixty odd soldiers in it and three officers. And they arrived and half of them didn't have boots. And they had me paid for about three and a half months. And four of them had Thompson machine guns with no magazines. The first week wasn't training; the first week was trying to get them equipped. It was very difficult. Because the province chief has the last say about where the money is spent, and the province
- 15:30 chief never wants to spend any money the Americans have given him to spend. So then you've got to go to the Americans and they've got to chase up, dreadful rigmarole.

How big was the actual Team in Vietnam at that stage?

Thirty one people.

And how many of them were with you then at that stage?

Ten.

And were the ten of you all involved in this particular training of the civil guard?

Major Murphy was the 2IC, Colonel Lance Sikall[?] the American

- 16:00 was the boss. There were about fifteen Americans. Oh more than that because the egg mob from there was an airstrip in the middle of the citadel at Hue for light aircraft and the observation flew those, there were about a dozen of them and they used to live in Hiep Khanh too, because it was a better place to live in Hue, although it was a half hour drive. It was on the main road and you turn left and it was about a ten minute drive along that road. And they liked it out there; there was a medical team too. I suppose all
- 16:30 up American/Australian there would have been thirty-five there I guess. We only ever had, we were only fired on twice, some random rounds were fired in and they might have been just angry civil guard soldiers who knows. It was night, dark.

And were you confident that you could trust the men that you were provided with or were you suspicious as to their

- 17:00 **their possible alliance with Viet Cong etc?**

Well you know there was very little margin. Depends what village they come from you know who was on top, if there was a Viet Cong unit operating in your village you went towards them. You know it didn't happen to us, but it has happened to other training regiments, where the unit was trained and re equipped and so forth and marched back to the village and the people come down that night and said, give us all your weapons, so they did. So it was

- 17:30 then the next step below them, we didn't advise that but it was another place just across the road and they actually trained the village defence people. They were the people that defend the village and they were given minor military training on how to fire the weapon and how to stand shoulder to shoulder and repel the invader from the village. Every time you gave them a weapon they sort of apparently, it was gone within a week or two. So it wasn't, although the ARVN, the regular unit seemed to be going well, they seemed to be doing pretty well. But the rest of it
- 18:00 was not working well at all.

Were they interested in the training, were they motivated these guys?

No. No they, they, they didn't really want to be there. They were pretty happy when give them pay and we give them boots and they were fed fairly well, but apart from that they weren't interested in being trained. This is a sort of third, third fourth grade soldier, he is not, he is not in the ARVN because he, he's been

- 18:30 they've looked for the ARVN, he is just one step ahead of this village defender guy.

And how would you communicate with these men?

Through an interpreter, I had an interpreter; I had the same guy all the time. And he would say things to me like "they are biffalos on the operative" - there are buffalos on the objective. And so every time he told me something in English I had to interpret what he actually meant. Good little guy, nice little bloke, and he used to try hard.

So you connected up with him pretty much

- 19:00 **as you arrived?**

Yeah, yeah. I did about the second, second day I was there, he was allocated to me. We only had a couple of vehicles and the range area was fairly big, we spent much of our time walking up there, the actual ARVN officers would give the lectures and we'd be there to actually check that they were giving the lectures. When you get there you'd say, "What does wack board[?] say?" He'd say, "So and so and so and so." "Aren't we doing field craft?" "Oh he has changed his mind." "What is he doing now?" "He is doing shoot to kill." "Oh right yeah." So they didn't follow the

19:30 plan, the syllabus.

Did it take long for you to get adjusted to that environment and get settled into Hiep Khanh?

No no. A couple of days I guess, got into the swing of it, out working, the raining season was getting wet. The rainy season in the North was different to the rainy season in the South. It was hot and dusty and nasty and Saigon was pouring rain and Hue was a bit different. And it was raining, it was quite wet, you got wet every day that you went out. We come back in and they had

20:00 they'd hired, hired, there was quite a big village by the side of the Kobi River not far away and they'd hired the women there to do our washing and so forth and dry our clothes and clean our hoochies and whatever, and our room. So it was comfortable living, the living was quite comfortable.

So you were in a hoochie?

Well it was all barrack rooms divided into rooms. And it was comfortable, furnished well, but it was. The living conditions in Hiep Khanh were good, out in the field it was miserable, you

20:30 were fighting to get, you could never quite reach your objective for each day, there was not a day I came in that they did what they were supposed to do. And I couldn't change that at all, so when they, when Major Murphy grabbed me one afternoon and said, "We are going to lose you for a couple of weeks." I said, "Oh are you, where am I going?" He said, "You are going to Khe Sanh." and I knew where that was. I knew all the places on the map, I knew it was on the road from Quang Tri to Savannakhet[?]. There was

21:00 obviously Se Pone, which was just over the border, 20 odd kilometres. So a very rainy Sunday afternoon we drove round little airfield outside the Kobi River. And this plane came in, this helio and this guy in a floral shirt and long shorts and the whatever and flew me up there and dropped me into a half team. The other half of the team was down at a place called Tobi, down in the valley, the Ashau valley.

Had they told you why you were heading there?

Yeah yeah, so the Americans could see how I worked

21:30 with them. That was the idea. And if it all worked there would be other arrangements made.

So this was after how long at Hiep Khanh?

I had been there about six weeks, seven weeks, when did I leave June, July, August. I went up to Khe Sanh in September.

So you welcomed the change at that stage?

Oh yeah. I was pleased to get out of Hiep Khanh. But got up there and there was Captain Swar was the boss, he was a good boss and we opened the batting by ripping out in the

22:00 bush for seven days. And that was an eye opener, I took binoculars and I took a compass and I took a pistol and I took this and that, the next time I didn't take any of that. Very quickly you realise everything you take you carry and there is no, as they said up round Khe Sanh the ground is all flat except you are standing on its side. And there appears to be no valleys, there just appears to be holes in the

22:30 hills. Very rough, very very rough country. And if you try to follow the rivers you run into these very steep banks that are hard to get up so mostly you have got to follow what ridge lines there are.

What was the objective?

The objective of Special Forces is surveillance. Gathering information. But because the size of our force it was also to get any minor contact we could, which we did. And we crossed into Laos from time to time and have a, run into the Pathet

23:00 Lao [Laotian Communists], the Asian equivalent of the VC [Viet Cong]. And we'd do alright; we used to do pretty well against them because they were absolutely terrible. I mean our Montagnard soldiers were poor. They weren't good, particularly our mob some of them were good. Down in Pai Que I think there is, I think there is the [(UNCLEAR)] down there, apparently they are pretty good, Pai Que and Da Bot that were down there, but ours,

23:30 ours were Bru, they've got a spoken language but it can't be written. Which makes them very primitive.

For this initial move into the jungle you hadn't been put with those guys yet, you were still with, with the small team of the Americans?

No, no.

You went straight, you went straight out with them?

Yep yep, watched them.

How big was the company?

We took out thirty, there was Captain Swar, me, American communications guy and thirty of them and I

think four

24:00 Nungs.

And this is the first time you had contact with Nungs?

Yes, yes it was. Yep.

And were you immediately assigned your, was it two?

Not then it was later on when I came back there. But one of the, one of those did finish with me and he spoke French, Vietnamese, English, and he had been a corporal in the French Army. And the French left him; he couldn't get in the ARVN army because

24:30 they were a bit worried that he might turn out to be a general or something I guess.

So when you first arrived there and you were introduced to your company immediately?

Yes.

Did you know much about the Montagnard tribes, had you been briefed thoroughly on that situation?

Yes I did. Yes, knew they lived in long houses, knew the girls chewed betel nuts and had black teeth and the guys smoked pot [marijuana] and had poor eyesight and poor physical condition, would have trouble going anywhere

25:00 at any speed, had trouble seeing things, believed in the gods of the forest and the spirits of the trees which was always a problem.

The gods in the forest?

Yes they used to build little temples to them, you come along and see a tree and you'd see a little house built there. That is where the gods lived in the forest, you had to be very careful not to disturb it otherwise they would get angry. And before before before your uncle died he never come back from there. I worked out a before was about twenty years so a before before before was sixty years.

25:30 **So how did they, how did they take to you, how did they welcome you?**

Alright, alright, yeah I used to be friendly and joke with them and laugh with them. We had a little rifle range and I used to take them down shooting and those that actually hit the target were few, I'd give them two cigarettes each. And if one guy won two cigarettes he'd would break it in half, so half would have half a cigarette each, they were like that, they shared everything.

Where they enthusiastic about working with you?

I don't think they minded, I don't think they were enthusiastic

26:00 If you gave them the choice of coming out with me or staying in, I think staying in would have won, they weren't all that keen on climbing over the hills. Basically they didn't climb, they lived in the mountains but they didn't go round climbing over them a lot.

Were they motivated to fight?

No no. They lived there for a thousand years, everyone had come and gone, they were still there. I guess that is the way they planed to be. The French could never do with them, or they didn't try hard, and certainly the Vietnamese didn't

26:30 try hard and neither did the VC or the the North Vietnamese, they never tried to school them in any great revolt, I think they all thought it was too hard, which it was.

Were you one of the first members of the Team to undertake this sort of work with them?

Yes. Yes I was.

And was that a challenge that you were happy about?

Yeah yeah yeah, someone was going to do it,

27:00 if it wasn't me it was someone else.

And how did you find them as people?

They were good, hygiene was absolutely appalling and if you stayed the night in the wrong house, all the cattle and the chickens and the pigs were underneath, the toilet facilities were pretty limited, yeah, if you could get past the hygiene of the place it was alright, but apart from that.

So you would often take them out and have encounters with enemy?

Yeah mostly

- 27:30 fairly limited stuff, our encounters were to, we'd always be going up a trail, they'd fire, half a dozen people would fire rounds down at us, we'd all take cover and fire back up the hill, and everybody wherever you were they'd fire so you make sure you got in front of a large tree or a large rock so you wouldn't get killed by your people. And I guess most of the wounded we took were from our own people. And the only problem was if you were far out, and because you were, because you were
- 28:00 working with the Montagnard there wasn't any medical casevac [Casualty Evacuation], no good ringing up for a helicopter and saying, "I've got four wounded, four wounded Montagnards." If you said, there were Americans wounded you'd probably get one. And we used to cheat by saying there was American wounded. So we started, later on we started taking extra Americans with us so we'd say he's wounded fly them out with our guys. And there wasn't a lot of helicopters there, there was the marine squad in Da Nang and that was it, bang finished.

So this work you were doing now

- 28:30 **was, was directly coordinated by the CIA?**

Mmmm. Yep. They paid all the money, sent the money up the hill every couple of weeks, we paid the force, we paid the soldiers, we bought them their food. Bought them boots and uniforms from downtown down Quan Tri there was a [(UNCLEAR)] obtained for it.

Did you get much of a briefing on, on on the nature of the operation and why the CIA was wanting to

- 29:00 **work this way and why you were separate from forces, did they sort of fill in any blanks for you?**

Oh no not really, there was no, it wasn't the CIA it was CSG Combined Studies Group, there was never a briefing from them. And perhaps the only guys I spoke to were probably a couple that flew up to see what was happening from time to time. But in all theory and objective you were, you were commanded by the B team at Da Nang.

- 29:30 And the B team commanded all the A teams and the C team in Na Trang it commanded all the B teams. So it was a fairly simple command structure. And there was a Special Forces brigadier down in Da Trang that commanded everybody. But you were pretty much a one out deal. I mean when it was all said and done.

You were a bit of an independent operator?

Yeah we were. There was no order coming out say do this tomorrow morning, or do that the next day, you worked out your operations and you planned them and you did them and

- 30:00 and you asked for your own supplies, and you paid your soldiers and you recruited them. I did that with a half team until just a week before Christmas and I flew back to Da Nang back to Hiep Khanh.

Were you training them as well as working with them?

Yeah we used to take them out and train them and work through little exercises and a bit of tactical and do it in the open so you could see what was happening. If you moved to the bush nobody could see what was happening and nothing happened. Take them on the range and have them shoot.

- 30:30 We it was one of, it was, we were looking, looking at their ammunition, a lot of it was green and rusty and yucky we had dug a big hole to bury it all. And we got their grenades and there was a, where the hut was the team hut at Khe Sanh on one side went down to a very deep valley a very very steep hill, I mean you really couldn't walk up it. So we took about a dozen of these grenades down and we threw about a dozen down over the hill and only one went off. So myself

- 31:00 and one of the sergeants Donny Hannon we went out through the fence worked our way down the hill and found a couple of these that hadn't gone off, had a look at them, and you could see where the fuse had burnt. You could see the end of the. So we got one and brought it back and opened it up. And they had scraped all of the explosives out of it, because apparently some months before they were out in the bush at night and somebody had dropped his grenade and it had gone off and it had killed two people. And they worked out if there was no explosive in it nobody could get killed. But of course if you use it you had to be a terribly good shot because you had to hit right in the forehead with it otherwise you wouldn't

- 31:30 do any good at all. So sort of cut back, they used to carry about four or five grenades, we cut back and give them one grenade each, it didn't do any good anyhow.

And you received regular payments from one of these mystery men in the floral shirts?

Yep yep. Bottom draw of the filing cabinet, it would have all the piastres in it. And poor old President Diem was assassinated and he broke it to us, about some hundreds and thousands worth of, piastres was still pretty good then, I mean you could spend piastre in Hong Kong.

- 32:00 We actually did on R&R [rest and recreation]. We were the first people to go on R&R I think. But that, that all come to a grinding end just before Christmas. I went back to Hiep Khanh.

And was that also when [President] Kennedy was assassinated?

Yes. While we were up there.

While you were there?

There was an ARVN battalion headquarters down the road towards Quan Ti, past what they call the TDY, bridge temporary bridge, big bridge over a valley, the American engineers had organised to build it, and built it. And there is a

32:30 phone line come to the battalion headquarters to us, and the phone actually worked. Which was quite surprising. And it was about 5.30 in the morning and the phone went. And I, we didn't have rooms we had cubicles, two walls, the rest was open to the rest of the hut, I got up and answered it. And it was the captain, the American captain adviser from the ARVN battalion. And he was telling me that President Kennedy had been assassinated, I said, "Ok alright then ok." I went round and woke up Captain Swar and said, "There is news from America that President Kennedy has been assassinated." He said, "That could not

33:00 possibly happen, not possible." So I wake everybody else up and we went to the end of the hut where the communications guy kept all his gear. And we tuned it to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], on the 6 o'clock news they told us that, the 6 o'clock morning news that President Kennedy had been assassinated. They couldn't believe it; they were absolutely shocked that their commander in chief had been killed. And quite angry, quite angry, they came up with all sorts of reasons why it happened and some of them were probably right. But they were really really shocked about it all.

33:30 **What were some of those reasons they were speculating?**

The way he was freeing up the relationship between white Americans, the southern Americans and the Negro. A lot of people didn't like that at all apparently. And we had, one of our people was Nelson Smith who was one of the medics and he was a six foot two Negro and this was his theory, that Kennedy had been killed because of his friendship with the Negroes or because he was a catholic. But certainly not because you know, there was no real

34:00 good reason to put forward I don't suppose.

So it was unsettling news?

Yeah and having Diem assassinated or organised to be assassinated some weeks later and we had, by then we had six Vietnamese special forces people up in the hills. There was, and they were, we could never get them to do anything, they wouldn't go out, they wouldn't do this and they wouldn't do that. And they were Diem's men. They were sort of the equivalent to Kennedy's men. And they, they the

34:30 the rest of the army, ARVN didn't like them at all because they were so privileged and we worried about them, that night we ran, we ran security that night, two of us at a time with Redman shotguns just outside the hut. And next morning we could hear this clunk clunk clunk noise and we thought what the hell is that, we went and had a look. We had been trying to get these guys to dig a weapon pit for weeks and there were the six of them out frantically digging this new weapon pit. Anything you wanted they would do. So they, they quickly saw the writing on the wall.

35:00 But they were recalled about a few days later and I got no idea what happened to them. But they would do up hill nothing until they found out their president was gone.

And did you also have discussions about why that assassination had taken place?

No no. I didn't get involved in discussions about it.

How did, how did, how did you personally react to that news, how did that make you feel?

I thought it was a pity, a great pity. I thought the whole of Vietnam War.

35:30 Now of course retrospect, but even then I thought it would have been a different picture. [General] Macarthur had told Kennedy don't get involved in a large scale war on the Asian continent. And I believe Kennedy would have taken that advice - not engage in a large scale war. But it wasn't to be.

At that point, having been in the middle of the thing for a while were you feeling

36:00 **like it was a good just cause and that progress was being made?**

At that stage most people, when we moved into Da Nang in February, we took over a house that had been vacated by half a dozen American officers to go home because they were cutting back the force by you know. Not just cutting back by a few guys they were cutting it back by a thousand a month. The advisors because they were winning. And that's how it appeared really.

36:30 But not for long.

So have we, do you think we have covered most of the important aspects of your time at Khe Sanh?

Yeah. Oh.

Is there any aspect of that that we have overlooked?

Well when I came back from Hiep Khanh they closed that down and then we all went back, we all went out to Special Forces. Rick Meed and I went back to Khe Sanh, they went out to Loi, Ashau, Tibot, Nan Dong and the group from Hiep Khanh went to seven different special force locations.

37:00 We were there; we were now fully inserted into special forces. We had a captain at the, at the B team headquarters at Da Nang who, who organised things.

So Da Nang was your next point of call?

They were our headquarters. Captain Delharty went out with his Special Forces group and won a military cross. Reg Stevens got a BM [Bravery Medal] for his work building an airstrip with a small bulldozer from scratch on his own

37:30 with a guy holding a bamboo peg up showing him which way to go. Yeah they did pretty well. And when we were back, when I went back of course there was Floyd Thompson was the commander, it was a full team, they had run this recruiting rally in Saigon where they had rounded up every teenage kid standing on the corner doing nothing, put them in an aeroplane and flew him to Khe Sanh, when they got a hundred or something of them in one day and they had never been out to the jungle or seen the high green hills in their life. They were street kids and they were petrified.

38:00 **So after you'd been working with the Montagnard for how long was it initially?**

Of the first, I was first sent up there I was there from June, July, August, from the end of August to the end of December and then I went back from the first week in February to the first week in July.

So what, what did you do in the interim before you went back?

Close up Hiep Khanh over Christmas, we closed it down we returned all the

38:30 stores, moved out, went to live in Da, went to live in Phu Bai which is the other ARVN army training base for about a week while we got organised and briefed and into Da Nang, took over Australia house and the next day we all flew out to our various bases.

So and for you it was Khe Sanh?

Khe Sanh.

So how did you celebrate Christmas Day?

We had it at Hiep Khanh. And that was Christmas dinner turkey.

39:00 Yeah we weren't doing any training; it was a fairly relaxed period time. The week over Christmas until the day after New Years Day, about two weeks, we really didn't do anything. Packed the place up and got ourselves organised, raffled the air conditioner, Jock McCourt won it and sent it home in a box.

So you headed back to Khe Sanh?

Yes.

And what, what sort of work did you then take on?

Took over a company as a company commander,

39:30 not the same company a bigger company, had about a hundred odd people in it.

And these, these were the kids from...?

No I hadn't got them, they hadn't arrived, I had been running my company for a while, when they arrived they put them into new companies, mainly put them into Khe Sanh protection groups, man the defences you know, I had a couple in my company. I had a young kid that would come with me, used to put my hootchie up at night, he was absolutely petrified from the moment we went into the bush until we got back out again, he was about 13, 14

40:00 I guess. Really really frightened. He heard the big tigers roar in the valley when the sun would go down and he would go white.

How old would he have been?

About 13. Little tiny guy.

Did he have any English, could you speak much to him?

No I would tell him what to do and he'd do it, I think he was pretty alert, and he lived on the streets all his life, he was pretty street smart in his way what he had to do, I'd show him once and that's all he'd be right then. He didn't have a weapon or anything, he didn't carry a weapon.

Did you sort of develop a bit of

40:30 **a friendship**

Yeah yeah. I used to feed him and make sure he got fed. And make sure he had cigarettes; he would smoke more cigarettes than I did. Yeah he was, he was a good kid.

So can you tell me about the company you had then, who it consisted of?

They were about two thirds Bru, I had about a dozen Cambodians and about half a dozen Laotians and about four or five Vietnamese who were

41:00 not in the ARVN army but who were in this strike force. And there were a couple of, it ranged between two to four Nungs, depending on where we were going and what we were doing.

So how, how big would that group have been?

The biggest group I took out was about 85.

Was it, was it difficult getting the various different groups to work together, was there tension there between them?

No I never had any problem them. I didn't tell them, this corporal spoke French and Bru and Vietnamese and English he

41:30 used to, he used to sort of run things. And the Nung sergeant, if he spoke everyone did it, if he said something I'd do it, he was, he was the guy there. They brought out a new weapon called the M79, it fires a grenade, but the grenade is like a great big bullet, has got a thing on it about yay big. And we were the first to get them and he had a look at that, it was his weapon. And so we went out on the range and he actually hit, at about a hundred metres he could actually hit a tree, he was very good at it. So he used to carry it swung over his shoulder with two bandoliers, he looked like a Mexican

42:00 general and he...

Tape 6

00:32 **Tell us what you know about Floyd Thompson and your experience with him?**

One of the things about Khe Sanh, about twice a week we'd get in a, a two seater aircraft called the L19 and we'd fly reconnaissance in our area of operation. If I was in and I wasn't out in the bush with my company I would do it, because I was artillery trained survey trained, I could read maps well and I could read aerial photos well. So it became one of my tasks.

01:00 And on Good Friday 1964 Floyd Thompson was flying back in the aircraft from Da Nang. He'd been down Da Nang trying to ring America, which you could do sometimes, his wife was expecting her fourth child and she was trying to contact her. He duly landed, with the same pilot I had flown with the Tuesday, Wednesday before. Who frightened me a bit. And Thompson said he had some information, he had been to a briefing and had information about some sightings

01:30 on the bulge. Which in the border, in the border there there was a bulge in it. So he took my maps and my binoculars and, and he duly flew back out and I drove the five, ten minute drive back to with an escort back to Khe Sanh. And I was reading a book and I looked at my watch and realised he had been gone for two hours and you couldn't be gone two hours. So I went over to the communication shack and saw the guys and said, "Come on we've got to make a do." So they put out some calls, they called other bases, they called other aircraft

02:00 they called aircraft in the air and no one answered. So we waited about another twenty minutes and we put out an aircraft down call. Within about half an hour we had a couple of planes up and one helicopter. And we did a quick search and it was dark. The next morning Colonel Chennault the son of the old General Chennault flew in, he was the coordinator of air rescue and we had about 20 aircraft of different descriptions in the air by lunchtime. They couldn't do much before ten because of the fog. And we flew

02:30 that day, and we flew the next day and we made no sighting. I had my Nungs and we had a Wessex helicopter, which the Americans call a H34 a marine, fly by marines and we had half a dozen people in it. And we'd land and we'd go and look at sightings and twice we repelled down and walked until we could get picked up. We couldn't find anything at all. The Australian Rick Rooney he was racing up and down the road with his group of people questioning the villages, various villages he'd pull in, they used all sorts of things, pay them money whatever, whatever.

03:00 **No leads.**

We were getting no leads at all, no information. And after, we kept the search going for four days and then they closed the search down and bad weather came in anyhow, we couldn't fly. Sometime later, it was said that he was alive but the pilot was killed but we had no confirmation of that at all. It wasn't until years later that Rick was in the army on the Vietnam desk and he rang me one day at Victoria Barracks and told me that he, it had been confirmed that he had been killed.

03:30 And then many many years later he rang me to tell me that he would be released from the, end of the week from a prisoner of war camp. Nine years and two months I think later.

Which made him the longest serving American POW?

Everyone believes Commander Alfez[?] the pilot shot down was the longest serving, but he was shot down five months after Floyd was taken prisoner. So he was the longest serving ever. And he came out and he died last year. Lived in Florida Keys, Key West.

04:00 Came out a major and went to school, did all the courses he had to do in the army for about two years and became a colonel. And the Americans do the thing where if you are a prisoner, you graduate to the next rank one day before anyone in your class, so you are always senior. And the last I heard of him in the army he was a full colonel and he was in charge of the Psy [Psychological] warfare branch at Fort Bragan. But I've still got his poncho as a matter of fact, I didn't have one So when he'd gone he didn't need it and I did. And I've still got it,

04:30 kept it.

Do you know what happened to him during those nine years now?

Not really I don't know the details, apparently there is a book that has been written, I tried to find out who has got it where is it, but I can't get my hands on it. But no, I know he was in Laos for about two and a half, three years and then was moved to the Hanoi Hilton [prison]. And he remained registered as a civilian up until the time he was released.

Because he told his captors that he was a civilian?

Civilian working for the [(UNCLEAR)] company and they took that in.

05:00 And what happened while he was a prisoner, I should imagine it wasn't great in Laos because he'd would've been out in the jungle. In some jungle camp somewhere and but he survived. He was a hard man, he was a survivor.

Was he, what was he like to work with?

Nice guy, good guy, used to, used to, if anything was going to happen he always included me in the briefing or the discussion or my opinion, he'd would say, "What do you think?" and I'd say, "Well I think whatever." he'd listen. Yeah he,

05:30 he was, he was a good man to work for.

You went for some really long long patrols for sometimes fifteen days?

The longest was seventeen days and we only did that because the helicopter pick up they were going to do never happened. And we didn't go as far as we were supposed to go, and we'd bivouacked for a couple of days because we were running short of food, and then they did do an air drop from a helicopter into the bush for some food and stuff. We weren't all that far away,

06:00 but just the orders kept saying it is going to happen, it is going to happen and never did. So finally we walked out, and I lost a pound for every day I was out there.

That is a lot of weight to lose.

Yeah.

Can you walk us through a day out in the jungle, pick one of those seventeen days what a typical day would have been like for you?

Well you organise, because the size of the group that time, I had broken them not into platoons but into four sections. And I had a

06:30 section up front, a section with me and two others behind me, and I'd rotate them, except for the section that I had, they'd remain the same. And we bivouacked, we'd tried to pick a hill, reasonably clear, and we'd get up on top of it and we'd put a circle round the top of it. And I'd be in the centre or to one side or whatever and we'd work it that a third were awake all the time. The chances of that happening were pretty remote, but that was the theory. A third would be awake all the time. And if you go up a hill high enough

07:00 no one is going to come. What you have to convince people, if you can't see them at night, they can't see you. This business of people creeping up behind you in the dark is all rubbish. So we'd do that and we'd camp down and they'd eat the foods that they had prepared. And it wouldn't be much it would be cold rice, and I had a bullion cube which I'd mixed into mine and I would take my vitamin tablets and I'd drink a lot of water. Now before, before, before first light, half

07:30 an hour before first light. We'd wake everybody and they'd pack their gear up. And then I would walk around and make sure they didn't leave anything behind, a had a couple of other people do the same thing, they had all this packed up. And the moment we could see, we would head off as fast as we could go, normally down hill heading down to go onto another ridge and we'd move very very quickly. And

when we got say to the river or the crossing we'd turn and go another direction for a couple of hours and then we'd stop. And then we'd have to light fires to cook rice because we didn't carry

08:00 K rations [dehydrated food] for them, they didn't have K rations. So we'd get all the stuff that was very dry, and they had big pots, and they'd boil up their rice and this would take about thirty, forty minutes, boil it up, put the fires down, pack everything up very quickly and take off like rockets in another direction. So you were going all over the place. And we'd try and head for another large hill that night.

Well what were, were you running away from them?

When we'd light the fires everyone would see the smoke so, you know you were in a no win situation, they had to eat, if they ate everyone knew where you were.

08:30 So you'd try and get out of that location as much as you could.

How often would you see action?

On the seventeen day one we made three contacts, three contacts minor contacts and we had two wounded, not badly.

So what can you talk us through a contact, one of those contacts how you'd operate?

I only had a couple of contacts that we did on the flat, normally we were going up a hill and we'd be tired and they'd be, and normally it would be after midday it would be late in the afternoon,

09:00 they'd used pick it well, we'd be tired and they'd fire down on us and we'd take cover. And I'd give some orders through about three change of command for somebody go round the side of the section and work their way up the hill the other way. And by the time they got up the hill and got to the other side the people had long gone. And that was it.

Did you ever have any face to face contact with the enemy?

Oh yeah you could see where they were firing from and if I was near I would fire back because I could fire better than any of them. I would stand up with my carbine and

09:30 I'd fire a full mag at wherever the fire was coming from there'd be thirty odd rounds going their way and they'd leave, they'd stop firing and go, it was never big. We were never entered a company or a platoon and they were either at Laos over the border or we were over the border, or VC there was never any, never any NVA [North Vietnamese Army], we never we never ran into a company of NVA, they would have walked over the top of us very quickly.

Did that happen to anybody else that you knew off?

When the fighting got bad down in Asna Valley and because

10:00 the NVA took Khe Sanh before the siege there, before the marines put on the siege around the airfield. And they took Khe Sanh, Khe Sanh had moved from the hilltop further towards the Laos border out towards Japone. And when they attacked they attacked with three tanks down the road, frightening. So I could hear this clanking. And he said, "I remembered that's tanks." so everybody took off.

Can you tell us the significance of Tiger Tooth Mountain?

10:30 Tiger Tooth Mountain is the highest feature of the north west corner of South Vietnam. If you stand on top of Tiger Tooth Mountain you can look down on North Vietnam, right down onto some of the roads and even down in Laos. And it was decided that the Americans would put surveillance radar up there, not aircraft radar, surveillance radar and the marines would do it. So the marines duly appeared, a platoon of them from Okinawa led by sergeant

11:00 officer and they would go out and do a surveillance. And a week or so prior to that there would be a marine major there and they had been talking about it. And I had been to the base of Tiger Tooth on two occasions; I had never been up it. And so we decided that my company and this platoon of marines would go to the top of Tiger Tooth. And we did, we got up there, looked around. And there is Tiger Tooth and another smaller hill on the western side of Oloa. Looked around, found some, found where people had lived there sometime before, little hoochies had been put up and fallen down.

11:30 And we did a bit of a reconnaissance look around and took some photos and whatever, came back down and a couple of weeks later the marine company moved in which was great because they brought a kitchen with them. We used to eat real food, instead of Mamma cooking for us in the kitchen and having a pet duck swimming in the sink. So they arrived and they went out and cleared the top of the mountain and cleared the top of the other one and put up their surveillance radar.

Were there trails on that mountain, was there any trails, enemy trails or anything like that?

Well people had

12:00 obviously been up there sometime before we were there because there was this little place where they had lived for sometime I guess. But there was no one there the day we got there, if they had they were long gone because we were making and climbing up the mountain and making a fair bit of noise anyhow. And there was about 80 of us and this marine platoon. We were all very fierce to get into

action. The day they landed, they landed in two providers and the plane stopped and they opened the doors and ran out and formed a half circle laying on their stomachs with their rifles. They were told as they came off the aircraft they would be fired on.

12:30 Unfortunately we were sitting on our two jeeps having a quiet beer. They weren't impressed at all.

Can you tell us a little bit about, there was an operation you did there, was it Operation Phoenix? Can you tell us, that was about that time?

No I didn't do it the Americans ran it.

Right ok.

This is where you went in and you got the, you knew where, you knew where the possible VC leaders were living and you roared in and got them. You drove into the town, you stopped in front of the door, and this is what the Brits did.

13:00 You kicked the door in, raced in grabbed this guy, dragged him back out and took him away. Very hard to do that in a place called - in the biggest village near us called Gonvei[?] because you had to bring a four wheel drive to get up the hill and get back down the hill. And you wouldn't do it at night anyhow because it is a road that has been dug out by hand by the Montagnards. And they said they'd come up, they actually sent a guy up to look into doing it and we'd do it we'd be in the phoenix operation, we never drove into any towns. How do you kick a bamboo door down? God.

13:30 **So in your opinion it was a military tactic that was..?**

It would probably work in Saigon or Da Nang or whatever, but the corruption was so bad whose door were you kicking down, you know that is the problem. Whose side was he on anyhow? I could never see how it could work in Vietnam. It certainly wasn't going to work in the mountains and we never tried to make it work. I think Floyd Thompson might have sent him some very colourful reports on the Operation Phoenix but that would be about all.

How did you deal with the trust

14:00 **issue between the Nungs and the Montagnards and the people you were dealing with given that you were in control of them and was it difficult to establish trust with these people, did you not worry about it?**

They were all simple people you know. I had, I had been there with my company and whatever working out at Khe Sanh and eventually I had my silver bangle, which I used to wear, that I was given to wear. And I gave, the guy that took over from me I gave it to him. Moira was very cranky about that, I should have, because there is a lot of silver in the river up there and they, they actually

14:30 make clothing with the silver thread in it. Which they beat out themselves. They you know, people say you must have got a lot of arts and crafts up there. But they are not terribly craft people you know. The long bow I brought home was on that was specially, they actually got it for me and gave it to me especially. I mean it wouldn't fire an arrow from here to that blind. They couldn't see for a start. They couldn't hit anything and you were told you were not allowed to hit hunting.

15:00 deer, they had this hand made net thing and they'd string around a lot of trees and they had this big corral and they'd beat the bush until the poor old bloody deer ran into the corral and then they'd beat the deer to death. And this was hunting because if they tried to shoot it they never would have hit it. No they had problems.

So trust wasn't an issue between you and the Montagnards?

Not at all. I don't think, I think if you've got people that believe knats in the forest I don't think you have a trust problem.

What do you actually mean by knats in the forest what are knats?

Spirits.

Oh the knats are spirits?

Oh yes they live in the trees.

15:30 Float around and they know all the ancestors that have died and you have got to be very careful. They live in some valleys you can't go into. That means you've got to spend half a day walking around the ridge to get in, because people won't go down there.

Were you, did you have to find that you were very culturally sensitive to them or did you have to try and?

If they said we are not going down there, they are not going down there. There is no good arguing with them and say that is rubbish, I know better than you because I come from Sydney. No, they wouldn't, no they had fixed ideas.

16:00 Felice's father was killed in the van, the little tiny van taking the money down to the bank in Quang Tri. And of course we made a few enquiries and it wasn't the VC at all, it was the bandits who had killed him

for the money. And Floyd Thompson said, "Well seeing as though he is the leading figure up here the Frenchmen we should go to the funeral." So we went to both of them, we went to the Catholic funeral and we went to the Buddha funeral. Because he had a French wife back who would be eighty odd back in France,

- 16:30 he had a Vietnamese wife who was about 70 and he had a Montagnard wife who was about ten. So we went to all these sorts of things. The body laid in state for three days in Khe Sanh with no refrigeration. Oh it was a gay party you have no idea. "Come and have a beer." "Oh yes."

You must have, your eyes must have been opening up to all these new experiences, it is quite different to life in Sydney. How were you coping with it, I mean did you, were you thriving

- 17:00 **on this new experience?**

As it happens it happens you know. You don't go, you don't go sit down at night and worry about it, it happens and you think about it and you store it away and you learn a bit, you get a bit more information, you learn something else that you can have and store away. Yes I used to get on pretty well with them really. I didn't try to get any of them killed; I tried to keep them out of trouble. I didn't take them to places that were impossible; I never told them to fix bayonets once because they wouldn't know what to do with them anyhow.

- 17:30 No I, I did alright.

Was it exciting thinking that you were working with the Americans, the CIA and you know, this is all stuff of films and you were doing that kind of work?

No, no you were working for your company your soldiers, they were my soldiers and I looked after them, get them fed and make sure their weapons worked. They had these, these M1 carbines the marines had in World War II and if you have seen them in the movies, and they've got a very tricky bolt set up, and they could take them apart and they'd

- 18:00 clean them up beautifully, but only half of them could get them back together again. So we would be down there doing a weapon clean after we had been out in the bush, and I had to go round and put them all back together again. So if we were out in the bush, "Please don't take your weapons apart." Oh god, you know, dear oh dear. But they were good people, they were good people, and they probably still are, nothing has changed they are probably living exactly the same way as when I was there, or 500 years before I was there.

They have always been sort of

- 18:30 **persecuted through the years no matter who has been in power?**

I used to call them the Moi wild people, Montagnards was a phrase for them in the early 60s, give them a better, the mountain people, the Montagnard. Or as we used to call them 'yards', "Are you up with the 'yards'?" "Oh yeah".

How did you physically maintain your health you know working in the jungle?

And can I put this delicately. I would say that I had diarrhoea in some form

- 19:00 from the moment I walked into Khe Sanh till the moment I walked out.

That must have been debilitating?

And it varied from time. We would go out on operation for 5, 6, 8 or ten days. And thank god we didn't do too many aways. By the end of it I couldn't pick, I had a rough big burgen rucksack and I couldn't pick it up. Once I got it on I could walk with it but a couple of guys would have to pick it up so I could put it on. And I would get really really weak. And you'd get back in, you would take a couple of days. But back in, back in Khe Sanh, we used to have Mamma from the village cook for us, and she

- 19:30 we had no refrigeration, so whoever was in town used to go down to the commissary and buy some food and bring it back. Donny Han was the youngest about 23 Special Forces. And he was down there and he saw the sale and he bought the steaks. There was 24 in each carton and he bought three cartons. There were 12 of us. So we had to start cooking steak immediately and Mamma was cooking it and she was cooking it by having about 4 inches of fat and deep frying it. Gee it was absolutely

- 20:00 disgusting. So I had to go and drag her away from that. "Donny Han why did you buy?" "I though we'd eat it all." so we did that night or most of it. But because they had no refrigeration you couldn't have a cold beer, no one had beer everyone had their own bottle of spirits and I had, I had a bottle, you buy the big bottle, I had a bottle of gin, I would buy limes down the village and I would crush a couple of limes and I had water and gin and soda. And I'd been out, I'd been out for about a week and I came back in and I was sitting writing a letter to Moira and I went over,

- 20:30 we had a little bamboo thing bar in the corner and I made myself a gin and lime and came back and I was writing to Moira and drinking it. And I thought gosh it is quiet in here, there were about 8 or 9 people here, it is quiet, went and got another one and brought it back, finished the letter and was sealing it up and I thought I will write a second one start tomorrow. "Why isn't anyone talking?" "Oh do

you know it was Rick's birthday." the other Australian, "while you were out Don?" "Yeah I knew, I knew it was his birthday I wished him happy returns before I went." "We drank your bottle of gin." "What am I drinking" "You are drinking medical alcohol"

21:00 "But we've tried it, it is alright." Thank you guys.

Was it alright?

No well probably because it was alright until they told me what it was, I won't have anymore of that, put that aside.

Was it difficult, what was the communication like the letter service between Vietnam and Australia while you were there?

We'd give our, we'd give our letters to a plane flying in or a pilot out and they were very good. And they'd get back to Da Nang and they'd give it to someone that worked in their headquarters and they'd take it over to

21:30 the B team and we had an Australian captain there and he'd go and post it in the normal mail because we were using the Vietnam mail service, and it was very good. Two or three days back to Australia. The assistance through the embassy was much too cumbersome.

So after Khe Sanh you headed home?

Flew out of Khe Sanh, came back to Australia House and they were changing. Jock McCourt was coming out of MDM no, I can't think of the name of the place now.

22:00 He was coming out and Kevin McConway was going to take his place and Kevin was at Australia House. And we had dinner that night, he flew out that day and Jock came in and the next day I flew to, that day, that day, that afternoon I flew to Saigon, I was in Saigon for two days and then I flew out then to Singapore. And it was planned I would go up to the battery at Trinda for a couple of days and tell them about Vietnam. And I got

22:30 to, I got to Singapore and the warrant officer, the British warrant officer in charge of transit said, "Do you want to go to Trinda today or tomorrow?" I said, "What is the other alternative?" He said, "Put you on a plane tonight for Sydney." "I like that one." So I collected all the papers, rang Moira, was put up in the motel for a couple of hours, Singapore Motel, very nice. Rang Moira and said, "I will be home tomorrow morning, the plane gets in about 6.30." and I duly,

23:00 I grabbed a cab, shot down to change alley. I ran round the market there in Singapore buying things, the cab driver was very good, he suddenly twigged what I was doing, so he is running around with me and we got in the store and we are buying all these things and how much, "No no." dragged me out of there "No no you are not going to take them over here." by the time we got over there they had knocked a third off the price. He must have saved me a hundred dollars. Got in his cab, tipped him well, into, into the airport, and we are sitting in the airport. And there is another

23:30 guy flying out with me but he is going on a different plane, he is going to Perth Don Dolton. You know "Don." "Don." So we are both sitting there with the transit warrant officers who are going to put us on the plane in about half an hour. And these two guys in civvies walk up and stand next to us and they are the two civvy instructors from Swan Island. And Borneo has just started. Sukarno has gone into Borneo and the first thought that went through my mind, "Oh Jesus." And they, the tallest

24:00 one I knew, he looked down and said, "No we haven't come to get you, this is just a coincidence, we saw you sitting here." Oh god.

Didn't take much to read your mind then?

Climbed on the plane, arrived home. In July in greens, freezing, Mascot, got off the plane, walked into the terminal, customs terminal, customs guys saw me, took his overcoat off and put it on me. Thank you, saw me to the door, I was warmer

24:30 and Moira was waiting outside with the kids and I was home again. Not well. Not well at all, but home.

What was wrong?

Oh well mostly stomach problems. Which I didn't know about for sometime. And I received a posting a couple weeks before I left. I was posted as the BSM; first of all I was an instructor of the office cadet wing at North Head. And they were doing a thing there for people that were going to be pilots. They were coming in and they were

25:00 doing a little three months little officer cadet thing at North Head. And there were also six air force blokes on it, four of them were going to be school teachers and two of them were going to be air force guards battalion and there was a lieutenant who was a chemist, a pharmacist and he was doing it. And I arrived and thought this will do me. I only did two weeks of it and they said, "No you are not going to be this you are going to be the BSM of the regional wing." Which had about a couple hundred students a year.

BSM of which training wing?

Regimental training wing. This is where recruits come from Kapooka to the school artillery and they do the recruit gunnery bit.

25:30 This is put your feet up, sit back Don, enjoy this. And of course six months later national service started, 2000 through the regiment training wing in a year, not 200. So it become a very big job. But I was sick and Moira twigged it, she knew, "You are not well go and see the doctor." so I went and saw the doctor and he sent me down to Manly Hospital to do some tests. And they weren't sure how many types of worms I had, but I had a lot. Once they cleaned up those I started putting weight back on. So I wasn't well to

26:00 start with.

Does the army look after that side of things do you or do you get access to medical care and help?

If I had of complained bitterly I would. But I hadn't done much about it, I really didn't want to go to hospital, that was the last thing that I wanted, to go to hospital. So we did it all through Manly hospital. And they were quite intrigued, a tropical diseases, this is really upmarket stuff. So we did that. And I spent a very, a very productive, very interesting three and a bit years

26:30 as BSM of RW [Regimental Wing], saw some magnificent soldiers come through my hands, all national servicemen, really good.

So this time you were, you were positive about national service?

Oh yes, there was gunner Nevin, gunner Nevin took the top of his finger off in the breech of his gun, a couple of days before his course finished. So he went to hospital and they fixed it and they gave him a week's leave and his sister lived in Sydney somewhere and he stayed with her. He came back and he was moved onto 1 Field Regiment, which was going to Vietnam in a couple of months. And it was the afternoon

27:00 and it was quiet now because all national service now were gone, only regulars were there. I walked round to the room where he was to see him about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I said, "Are you ready to go now?" "Yes Sir I'm right." I said, "Early, have you had your early meal?" "Yes I have had my dinner, and they'll send a car at 4.30 and they'll take you to Central Station." "Are you excited about getting to 1 field to Vietnam?" and he said, "Sir, I'm anti Vietnam." I said, "Oh are you?" We used to run a lecture thing for the one hundred and fifty odd guys that came in on the night they arrived we would have these stands and I would be one of the interviewers, interview

27:30 the guys a few questions, "What do you think about Vietnam?" "Oh I'm against that." post to 16 Defence Regiment, they didn't send reinforcements to Vietnam did they. So you would go to Adelaide if you were anti. I said, "Well you could have spoken up at the interview." He said, "I couldn't." "Why?" "What if five years from now I find out I was just frightened." Ok, away he went, he did very well. And I am interviewing a guy who is what 24, 25 years of age and he has finished his three years at the Church of England seminary hasn't he and is in his last year.

28:00 And he said to the Bishop, "I should really put my name down." The Bishop said, "If you want to you put it down." up come his number. I said, "What, what do you see yourself doing?" and he said, "Anything but the padre's driver." These are the sort of people you are dealing with. He wanted to be a surveyor when he went to Vietnam, bombardier eventually, very good.

Was that a source of pride to you to be training these young men who were going to go and do and experience what you had?

Oh yes. Yes and they were excellent. And I firmly believe out of the

28:30 gunners. We didn't send a gunner that said, "I don't want to go." National servicemen, we might have sent the odd regular gunner that didn't want to go, but we certainly didn't send any national service because we gave them this out all the time.

That was a policy put in place?

A very unofficial policy put in place. But if they said, "Oops Vietnam." you would become a defender and you went to Adelaide for 16 anti aircraft regiment.

How did you adjust to being back in Australia after that really

29:00 **amazing experience?**

I was still in the army.

So it didn't matter?

No, no. You go to work you do your job; you obey orders and give orders.

But you are not trekking through the jungle anymore with Montagnards?

No it is another job, a very interesting job, very hard work. I would be out of here on my way to work at 6.30 in the morning so I would be up there chasing instructors. We had, we had 17 sergeant instructors

we had about four warrant officers a couple of officers. A lot of courses, we had about a dozen courses

29:30 running at one time, coordinating them, trying you know making sure they were all in the right place at the right time. Their period of PT every week. Bombardier Fulton the football player with one of the PTIs [Physical Training Instructor] used to really rip into them. No it was good. And it was, I was working away quietly there and I got the word that I would be going, I had been promoted to WO1 and I would become the RSM of the 4 Field Regiment in Townsville. And I would go back to Vietnam in March 1970.

30:00 So I come home and broke that news.

And that was bad news, good news?

We weren't all that excited about it. I don't know whether, the fact that I was going back to Vietnam or the fact that I said, "Why don't we all move to Townsville." And Townsville, Townsville is good now because they have got all that water coming out of the Burdekin Dam and they've got sprinklers going and trees, there was no water. It was dry. We got a brand new house, never been lived in, beautiful, well, very furnished, because everything was furnished for you. And there were no fly

30:30 wires. And the windows are from the floor to the ceiling and there is no fly wiring. You can't have a light on at night, really you shut the window and temperature goes up ten degrees. The kids went to these schools and it was hot and dusty. The only thing that saved us was the pool at Lavarack [Barracks]. We used to get them over there most afternoons.

What were you doing at Townsville?

I was the RSM of the regiment. And I was very fortunate, my CO was a fellow by the name of Colonel Brian and my 2IC was Don Quin, who become,

31:00 we become very good close friends over the years. Brian died, he was made brigadier, he was made brigadier. It was in a couple of years coming back.

What did you have to do as the RSM of the regiment up there?

Maintain discipline. On behalf of the commanding officer, which is, find out what the wishes of the commanding officer was, what degree of discipline he wanted and maintain it. And the morale amongst the senior COs, couple of young sergeants, had to take into gear and say, "Hey listen, get your

31:30 private life organised or you don't come with us." "Oh you can't." "Yes I can".

Did you enjoy that work or..?

Yeah, yeah. I liked being RSM it was good. And before I got up there of course I was all packed, I had my suitcases in the lounge room there and Moira is up working in the canteen at Harbord School. And I've gone up to North Head for the last time and the CO tells me that you're not going Townsville tonight you are going to Paris next week for ten days. For the 50th Armistice, anniversary

32:00 of Armistice Day.

Tell us quickly about that, was that a wonderful experience?

Carried the flag, marched down the Champs Elysees, past De Gaulle. And then we had the next day off, the next day by bus we went to the village of Albert, Amiens and then to Villers-Bretonneux and then we did a ceremony there at each of those places.

Who else came with you?

We took, it was a 707 full and we had a band, the army contingent, the air force contingent and the navy contingent came out of the sailors that were trained to be submariners in England, and they just came over the

32:30 channel, flew over. But we Villers-Bretonneux we did the ceremony there and they put a reception on at the big Town Hall. And our band got up and played, and the young soldiers were dancing and so forth and this, the Mayor come and said, "You come with me, warrant officers and officers come with me." So we went with the mayor about two blocks away and into the school, the school of Villers-Bretonneux and it was, the school of Villers-Bretonneux was completely wrecked by World War I. And if you walk up by the railway station there is a bridge and on the other side of the bridge about so high, there is

33:00 a brass plate on it. It will tell you that this is the closest the Germans got to Paris; it is here where they were stopped by the 4th division of the Australian Imperial Forces in 1918. So when the war was over, the by donations from the various battalion organisations they rebuilt the school for Villers-Bretonneux, and there was a fair bit of money left over that they invested. And it was a very old school, but got all the amenities, heating and whatever.

Do you know why you were chosen?

You had to be tall, good looking and decorated.

33:30 Will that do?

That brings me to your MBE [Member of the Order of the British Empire]. You have an amusing story about finding out that you, that you received the MBE, can you tell us about that?

I'll finish the Villers-Bretennoux one first. We rolled around to the, we rolled around the auditorium and here is 4th class with a very pretty French teacher. She is standing up there with 4th class and they sing Waltzing Matilda in English. If you are in 4th class of Villers-Bretennoux you take two periods of Australiana a week and you learn to sing Waltzing Matilda in English. I thought what a lovely touch, yeah.

34:00 Yeah I didn't know about the, they tell you a week or so, if you are in the army they tell you about a week or so you are getting a decoration. And they said, "Do it by signal." and the signal came into the school artillery after lunch on Christmas Eve.

What year was that?

1965, 64, 64, yeah I got it in 65. And of course the orderly unit closed down, and when it reopened for the couple of days between New Years and Christmas

34:30 there were only auxiliary staff, no one cleared the signals because who is going to read them, the CO is not there. Because it was a signal saying I got the MBE [Member of the British Empire]. So I didn't know until a guy I served with in Korea rang me up and congratulated me at 6 'o'clock on New Year's Day in the morning. Sent Chris down to get the Herald and there it was.

And that was for your first tour of duty?

Yeah in Vietnam.

How did that make you feel, were you proud?

Oh very pleased, very pleased, very pleased for me, for Moira, Moira should have got a bloody medal too. But no it was very pleasing.

35:00 to be rewarded.

So can you lead us up to Vietnam for the second time, take us back up there with you?

Pack up, come back, go up there, take over as RSM and here is the regiments, come back to Vietnam, come back to Wacol in Brisbane where they are told you are not staying here after two months, all move to Townsville. So not only are they the regiment only half of them are there but they are moved twice. So they are in a bit of, the CO is not there and the 2ICs are not there and I'm not there, so arrive first off

35:30 the train. You had to go by all means by train, which was the stupidest thing I ever heard of. It is dusty and it is hot and it is nasty and everybody is laying around and leaning against walls and smoking. But I had to sort a bit of that out for a start, sort the mess out for a big start, it was a mess. Get in touch with Moira, make out some inventories, come back before Christmas, take inventories to Victoria Barracks. Well I ran into an RAAF captain who was great. He said, "Do this, do that, do that."

36:00 I went and did that and come back he said, "Right you fly out with the family on such and such of January." Pack up the house, you've got to pack up two ways, you've got to pack up the stuff you want to take and pack the stuff you won't to store, you don't take your furniture with you. So we do that, it all happens. And away we go. And you didn't flew direct to Townsville in those days by jet, you only flew as far as Cairns and then you went in an Electra which we land in Mackay and you take off in a half hurricane and then they serve lunch, mushroom chicken. I've got kids that are being violently ill everywhere,

36:30 you've got no idea, it is terrible. Then we land in Townsville it is clear and it is about 45 degrees, it is January, it is terribly hot, there is no breeze and we are in the suburbs of Vincent, which is one of the inland ones. And it is new and there are no gardens and there is no grass and you could, if you had any grass you couldn't water it anyhow. So the move up to Townsville was a bit traumatic, bit traumatic.

From Townsville you went straight to Vietnam?

No no we were there a year for training. The regiment were reinforced and retrained. So I dragged them all up to Townsville

37:00 and for most of the year I left them anyhow, I was out in Hervey Range, which is beyond Townsville, which must be the hellhole of earth or back to Canungra again for a trip, Shoalwater Bay. A lot of training. And the regiment is right to go, ready to roll, bring them all home the following week; we are not going to leave up there. She reckons I should have but I didn't. I didn't leave up there. I'm lucky I didn't because our neighbours Tom Burney, he got shot and killed and she would have been living next to the widow of Tom Burney.

37:30 Home, kids back to their old schools, which was, which was good, they enjoyed it. Wendy back to Manly girls, Karen back to Manly girls too, Tim back to Harbord and Chris back to Manly boys. And I go back up there and I get pre em leave for seven days with my CO which we organised and we come down

seven days before we fly out, so I had a week at home and Moira came out to the airport, out we flew back to Vietnam. And going back, not only was I

38:00 RSM of the regiment, but I was task, brigade sergeant major or task force major because whoever was RSM of the regiment was also doubled as that job so. If the general, the American general was coming down with he's sergeant major and they always did I'd get a phone call from the brigadier's agent and I'd shoot over and stand next to the brigadier, which I did almost every day. And I met John Long the brigade sergeant major from the 20th division of others and we have been friends ever since. His wife and kids, well his grown up sons were only out here last year. Stayed in Manly, ran around.

So were you

38:30 **were you looking forward to your second tour of duty?**

No no, not really. No. I told Moira I would not get shot at and I would probably not get wet, now I lied, I did get wet a couple of times. And the only time we were really in any danger John Long said, "Come, bring bring yourself, I will send a helicopter down and bring half a dozen of your boys up on Saturday night we'll have a farewell barbeque and stay overnight." "Ok." so we all trundle over to the helicopter back and jump on the helicopter which he sent down, and we fly up and we land,

39:00 and we are having cold beers and they've got a barbeque outside, this little area around their, around their building outside it is a bit cooler outside. And just down about one hundred and fifty metres away there is basketball court and they are playing basketball, it is just getting dark and they've got lights on it. As they turned the lights on they mortared it. And one of my BSM from headquarters battery said, "The only time I got shot at was when he took me to a bloody barbeque."

It was more dangerous in Vietnam then than when you were there, I mean the war was in full...?

Yeah, yeah. Oh yes.

39:30 **So you were based in Nui Dat were you?**

Yeah, yeah. Yep Nui Dat, had a tent, like a little house, had a fridge, lighting, two rooms, fly wire all around, very comfortable, very comfortable.

And some of the, can you talk about some of the people you were working with, were they good soldiers?

Yes we had, our regiment was excellent. We had a great CO, great 2IC, battery commanders were very good, our batteries performed very well. We had no hiccups.

40:00 I kept a list of charge reports and compared to other units we had very few soldiers do - we had two soldiers charged with having illicit drugs, they had two hash of cigarettes, they were both drunk, and they were picked up by the provos in town, they were the only two.

What happened to them, what was their punishment?

They were both headquarter battery people and the CO sent them out to a 5 Support Base for two months. And they hated it. Another soldier

40:30 a national serviceman, a very good soldier, he used to keep getting drunk out on the 5 Support Base, so they dragged him in and fined him 28, he gave him 28 days loss of pay, he dragged him in the second time and gave him 28 days loss of pay, dragged him in the third time and said, "You think I am going to send you to jail don't you, well I'm not, get back out there and work, 28 days loss of pay, you are giving a third of your year to the queen." "Oh, oh." and away he went.

Was alcohol a big problem?

It was a bit no end of problem with drugs and the Americans. We had, we had our two batteries, the New Zealand Battery 161

41:00 and we had an American Battery, a self propelled 155s - mounted on a big tank. And their first sergeant, their BSM was fellow by the name of Chuck Bolons, he was a Negro, very fine soldier, been and fought in Korea. And they had only, I sort of arrived and took over and I was there a couple of weeks and he come over and said, I said, "Why don't you have dinner with me tomorrow night?" So he come over and had dinner and he said, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "I will buy you a beer." He said, "Lets go for a walk first." So to walk

41:30 from where I was to his battery would take about ten minutes down the road and into his battery lines, bunkers and things, because you can't dig their guns in you've got to build walls up round them. So he walked me round these hoochies that they built, they build them out of ammunition cases full of sand like bricks, walking past, walking past the six guns, past the six hoochies, got round the other side and he said, "What do you reckon?" "It is unbelievable, can you stop it?" "No you can't, arrest them all, put them all in jail."

42:00 **What were you looking at can you tell us?**

Tape 7

00:31 **Just at the end of the last tape Don you were, you were telling us a story of getting a tour of an American camp and observing?**

The battery was in our regiment.

Yeah sorry some drug taking going on amongst the Americans?

It was widespread it really was.

Can you just take us through the sorts of substances that you were aware that they were using?

01:00 The young man a few months later put a rifle in his mouth and killed himself, as far as I can work our he was injecting himself with heroin, sniffing cocaine, and he was sniffing aeroplane glue from his aeroplane sets, so any drug anyway they could possibly, and the problem was that they could go out and buy a good fix 52 percent fix for about ten bucks. When they got back to the states they couldn't buy a fix like that for

01:30 a hundred bucks. So next minute they were robbing the local store to get money. But it was an enormous problem, I don't know why they weren't any more trouble than we were, I think the draft, their draft was a problem. A lot of people said their draft system was unfair. A lot of people didn't get drafted and that is obviously when you look around at some of the more moneyed people. We probably had a draft system that wasn't fair either because not only when your number wasn't called you didn't go but when

02:00 your number come up. One of the, one of the things people overlooked that only about a third of the national servicemen were called up ever went to Vietnam, the other two thirds didn't anyhow. And people can get very emotional about this. I was only 19 you know - written about the national servicemen, there were no 19 year old national servicemen, you didn't sign, you didn't have to register until you were 20. So when we went over our caterer it took 80 or 90 ready made chocolate cake packets for

02:30 21st birthday parties. They, you'd send out the cakes to the guys on, what else did he buy, he bought a dough breaker, it is a machine that turns, that breaks the dough so it comes out nice and flat. You can then made pies. So instead of us sending out what they call the pie cup - the helicopter would try and give us some meal stew and stuff he'd make them four pies each with tomato sauce and they reckoned it was great. Because you didn't need a knife, fork or spoon, you could walk around eating, he was, he was very good Squizzy Tailor, or tailors are squizzy,

03:00 he was an ex navy cook but very excellent, he was very good.

So the 21st birthday was an ongoing event?

Yeah well if you had 80 national servicemen you'd have 80 21st birthdays you know. Our CO was very good he was, he was the guy mixed up with the Willese affair, the kiwi battery fired. First of all we had ambushes, fixed ambushes, and they were called the pogo ambushes, because the waiters and the cooks and the whatever drivers did to them, they were in fixed positions just outside

03:30 Nui Dat, perhaps only 500 yards out but in fixed positions but in fixed positions. And this young officer took, you know he had only been in Vietnam a little while, he was sill in the regimental holding unit. And he took this one out that night this night, put it into position, but before he went out that afternoon he come to command post and said, "I would like to adjust fire." and they said, "Yeah you can do that, here is your good reference to give, you can adjust fire twice, no more than 200 metres each time." So he, when he come up there the 161 Battery were in camp and they engaged for him and he goes from corrections

04:00 and he drops 400, and then he dropped 200, which is right on top. So I think 3 were killed, 3 were killed, 3 were killed and about five or six wounded. And there was an investigation and it was found that the kiwis weren't doing, it wasn't their fault this young man had been quite foolish and went, I don't know what happened to him. But I never, he went. Senator Willese in the end, being interviewed in summer in Australia about Vietnam and that, he said, "It was obvious that New Zealand would serve anywhere at all and Australia would serve

04:30 anywhere as long as they were out of range of the New Zealand guns." So my CO lived over near the headquarters which was about 6 or 8 minute walk from where I was. The phone went, I had a field phone as an RSM, "Come and see me." I was in the hoochie so I bowled over, it was like a little house it wasn't a hoochie and bowled over, he was in having a shower and he said, "Get a beer out of the fridge." I said, "Thank you." I get a beer out of the fridge. "Read the signal on the table." I read the signal it has been addressed to Senator Willese, for your information causing you to say this, and I can't remember

- 05:00 the exact words, obviously it has been false, you have given false information and you are wrong and I await your early apology or you must clearly be branded a liar. Jesus Christ. So he bowled out with a towel wrapped around him and he grabbed a beer. And he said, "What do you reckon about that?" I said, "You can't send that." "Too late." I said, "Who did you send it to?" He said, "I sent it to the CGS [Chief General Staff], the Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition, Senator Williese and the Canberra Times."
- 05:30 Oh Christ. Moira would send me a letter that thick, and all it would have in it would be the editorials. And he started getting mail from people, fan mail. One of his jobs was to answer his fan letters about how he stopped for his man and so forth. And of course the Kiwi Battery if you went into their mess they had this big blank wall and we got and said, "You must bring the CO over and see how we just repainted the ORs dinning hall." You know I walked over this afternoon. And one of, they had
- 06:00 this guy who was a very good artist, my CO had a bushy moustache and they've done this caricature of him on this wall, and underneath 'stick your bloody something up your arse senator.' And I thought there was a great career because done very well over in Vietnam. There was a great career gone, all over read rover. He was home in six months and he was a full colonel and 18 months later he was a brigadier. He overcome the, but the kiwis the New Zealanders would have have given him the South Island
- 06:30 if he could of got away with it.

Did he get reprimanded internally?

The CGS was up a couple of months later. And I hear this second hand from Don Quin the 2IC.

Can you just explain the CGS?

Chief of General Staff and apparently he said, "Brian I've just been to the staff college talking to the staff down there." The staff college is at Queenscliff where the colonels go to become brigadiers. And he said, "They asked me if it was alright now to talk to the press about politicians, I told them only if they were right."

- 07:00 And that was that. But Senator Willese replied by saying "It was a sorry day when army officers could make comment about their politicians." But yeah he was a soldier's soldier.

Did he register an apology Willese?

No, politicians don't apologise, god.

What was your COs name?

Bushy for the moustache. Bushy or brushy depending who was,

- 07:30 but he was a great CO, he was really good, he was a man's man, looked after his soldiers.

Good for morale?

Christmas Day was coming and we are talking about dinners and this thing and of course it is the middle of the dry season. Very hot. And we said, "What are we going to do?" and he said, "We will put on this, we are going to have turkey." "No we are not going to do any of that it is too bloody hot for that." "What are we going to do?" he said, "All those not on duty." and the shift didn't go on till 8 o'clock, the 8 o'clock, this is in headquarter battery. He said, "They are going to go away and have a barbeque at one o'clock and you are going to have the best steaks

- 08:00 and sausages and eggs and bacon and bread rolls." he said. "The RSM are going to have as much as they can drink between one and three. I said, "Where are we going to get the beer?" because we are on two cans a day. He said, "That is a problem I am entrusting with you." So I had a an armoured personnel carrier had been on repairs from Ban Tau was coming back from workshops so he brought back a pallet of beer, so it wouldn't be detected and delivered it to me. People were duly paid.

Was it hard to locate the pallet?

No I had friends in high places. Particularly where

- 08:30 beer was concerned. And so they did that and it finished and they all went off to go to bed and sleep it off and the next day we did exactly the same thing for the people who had been on duty that day. Now the reverse of that of course is they, that the Task Force Maintenance Area, TFMA, this is the people that ordnanced the trucks, this is in the middle of Nui Dat, they've had a big Christmas lunch and a lot of people have got pie eyed and so forth. And the diggers boozier is closed that night because they've had enough
- 09:00 but the officers' and sergeants' mess is open. And there is three sergeants sitting out at this table outside little veranda thing this building that was the mess. And the solder went and got his rifle and killed two and wounded the other one because they were drinking beer and he wasn't. So you've got to. And about eight or nine years later Moira were down for a holidaying in Tasmania and I was laying in bed in the morning reading the Tasmanian Times and I found out that the Court Martial Appeals Tribunals had just met for the first time since World War II

09:30 in Hobart. And they released him. Spoilt what was a great day, it really did.

Did you know the circumstances of his state of mind?

Oh drunk, off his head, cranky, and someone should have detected it and they didn't. And they handled it, it was handled badly but I don't think if something was handled badly you don't have to go round and kill two people.

Were you going out of your way to warn your men against...

10:00 **the using drugs or it wasn't necessary you just realised that they weren't going anywhere near that side of things?**

We had that understanding before we went. Booze and weapons didn't mix, anybody on drugs there was no second chances. There was no, you be a good soldier, you'd go to jail and then you'd go home. But they do jail first, we would send them to jail in Singapore. We'd have to do that. The battalion had a couple of blokes in jail in Singapore for, because it was over

10:30 thirty days for 60 days and they came back and said, "Hey didn't want to do that again." The Brits were in the jail there. But no we didn't have a lot of problems, we had a lot of minor problems. Unauthorised discharge of weapon because they forgot to put the safety catch, which killed people, it didn't but if you fired your weapon unauthorised you got 28 days no pay, no argument, regardless of rank. So we had two sergeants do that and an officer.

Was was having a few beers at the end of the day pretty much

11:00 **part and parcel of the whole, of the whole camp?**

Yep. We organised it, it was always cold. We had, we always had a good NCO running it, a bombardier and the the mess and they built and worked on it, we always had a good movie. We we built an open air theatre with sort of a shed over it, big high shed so if it was raining you could still sit there, great story. The movies came out on the movie circuit and you always knew what was coming out next and guys looked at this.

11:30 "The night they rode at Menskies' had lots of nude girls in that, 'Bora Bora' was quite unbelievable and these movies would arrive and I would get complaints the next day, particularly from the RP bombardier the Regimental Police bombardier. "That 'Bora Bora' was on last night sir." "Yeah, no nude scenes in it." And I got this complaint about half a dozen times. And we used to, Sunday mornings we would have the RSMs conference and I would run it. And all the RSMs and civilians would come in, from a different unit each time and we'd have a bit of a talk and tell them what the policy was, where they were going wrong, what they should be

12:00 doing. And I had my chief clerk read out what had just been sent by the army's notice, because they wouldn't have read it. And I said, "What about this movie bloody thing, all I get is complaints about it?" None of us seeing these great movie scenes, and they all said the same thing. So the, the away two provo got onto it and he went back to one of the small Australian cells back at, there was an ARVN camp back at near Van Kep and checked when they did the movie he cut the good bits out, so he had this great movie, no story, but

12:30 great scenes. So he had to, we had to cut them out of the movie circuit altogether, chopping the, chopping the rude bits out. God.

Was there any concern that the drinking culture would get out of hand, that it would become too much?

Oh yes yes yes yes. You had to, if you were found with a bottle of spirits you were in big trouble, there was no booze on field support bases at all of any shape one way or

13:00 form. And they used to rotate their soldiers, they had a little base camp as well in Nui Dat and they'd rotate, if you were out there for a week you come back in for two days and you did, you did work around the camp for two days and you'd get a couple of beers and then you go back out again. No it's, it's, booze is death. People die because there is booze, so we kept a pretty tight hold on it. And they, they went along with it. So you had R and R [Rest and Recreation] and you had R and C [Rest In Country], R and C was down at Vung Tau for 3

13:30 days, go down to the R and C camp, swimming pool, movies booze, bombed out of your tiny mind, go to bed, wake up eat well, come back at the end of 3 days. R&R was go to Taipei, Singapore, Hong Kong, Menai, Tokyo one or the others and Australia. You really couldn't get to Hawaii because, that was the most, that was the biggest the Americans did, they'd fly out their and their wives would fly out from the states. Sydney most of them,

14:00 a lot of them went for Taipei. The youngies went for Taipei, they were very keen about it. And I, two of my sergeants were going there, my RP sergeant and survey sergeant. "Buy me an electric train set." they said. "Ok sir" they come back with a lovely electric train set. "Sorry about that." "Hey greatest toyshop you've ever seen, they let us run and control the, and serve cold beer while you are doing it." So Tim got himself a you beaut train set.

Did you, did you do the Vung Tau visit

14:30 **yourself?**

If we went down, I hadn't been down and the task force commander grabbed me one day and said, "What does the RSM do for and C?" I said, "RSMs don't do anything for R and C, sir." And there was also apart from the RNC centre there was the other hotel centre, which was for people coming from where you weren't coming down as a unit group, you were coming down as an individual. And the next thing I know the warrant officer that ran this three story little hotel type place rang me up and said, "I've got, I was told the task force commander told me to reserve a floor for the RSMs

15:00 for next Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, what time will you be here?" So I rounded them all up took about ten of them down, sat around, drank beer and told stories. And not worry about the regiment. And I kept my R&R until, you couldn't take it in your last 90 days, so I took mine and I only had about four months to go and it was before Christmas. So I would come home on R&R, have five days go back Christmas would be on and I'd be home early March, first week in March.

15:30 So we came home and we were going to drive up the coast and we were going to surf and carry on and whatever. And it was raining, we got as far as Maitland and it never stopped raining, so we come back down the Colo Putty Road and went to Katoomba where it snowed. So we have photos of the kids having snow fights. So I came home and five days later I got on the plane and went back.

What sort of operations were your men involved in while you were there the second tour?

We'd fire and support, we'd go out and establish, well Coral was probably the most famous, not our regiment,

16:00 they went into a fire support place late that afternoon and were attacked that night. And the V, the NVA actually ran over two of the guns, which the gunners took back by charging the guns and taking them back. And John Stevenson got a Military Medal because he was firing, there is a round called the frachet and you fire it, and how can I describe it. It has got ten thousand little nails in it, like little arrows they are. And he was firing frachet at them coming out of the trees, by sighting along the

16:30 barrel in the dark. Throw another one in and fire it, and they turned them back. They really did. So not only the gunner out on the fire wall base had to man his gun and fire under any circumstances he had to do his own perimeter of defence. Which they did, and they formed pretty well, our guys did pretty well.

Would you go out on patrols or were you pretty much doing your work from camp?

No no. I was in base all the time. Flew

17:00 a bit, I used to fly a bit. Fly, I would go out to the support bases. If they were on I would go out and stay the night. I would go out one night a week. Go out and stay there and talk to them, see how things were, get the feel of it and come back in. But I was, I was responsible for our part of the fence perimeter of Nuidat. That took up a bit of time, not a lot. But we'd have stand toos at times, get people off their bottoms, get the clerks out and whatever.

And was it your observation that the national

17:30 **servicemen faired particularly well as soldiers over there?**

They were excellent. They were as good if not better than any soldier I have served with. They were very very good. There was one, what was his name, Donald, can't think of it now. He was a young high flier in some company in Perth and he was due to go home in, he wouldn't do 12 months, he would only do eight months or nine months and his two years was up. And he would go home in sort of November and they were sending him to the States to the other company in

18:00 January. And some said, oh I can't remember his bloody name, I should, "He has resigned for another three months." I said, "You're joking?" "No." So I grabbed him, I said, "What have you done?" He said, "I resigned for another three months." "Why?" "We don't go home till March, it is my regiment too." So he went home in March and they sent him to the States in April instead. And I thought you know his regiment wasn't going till March and neither was he.

And what was general morale like?

18:30 Good. I can't say what it was like in the Australian Army but I thought it was pretty good in the Australian Army but our regiment was good, we kept an eye on things. Found, got the odd one that we'd you know the odd bloke who raced against Jack Brabham and rode in the Kings Cup and oh did something else and something else. Was complaining bitterly he wasn't getting marriage allowance. The CO was most irate because he had been out of fire support base and this guy told me that he wasn't getting marriage allowance, all these other married guys.

19:00 So we sent off a signal to Hobart to check it out and back came the answer that nurse Mary Smith had been out with him twice and had no intention of marrying him. His mother didn't know he was married. In the whole of Australia there was no Chaplin Burges, there was about ten questions we asked and they were all negative. Because he just made all this up because someone said, "Oh you get marriage allowance, you just tell them that you're married." The pay sergeant said, "If you show me a marriage

certificate I will pay it." So he had to come in and explain "Oh yes I am married."

19:30 I was listening to this while he was talking to the adjutant and I was listening to this that is odd. So we got him to go over, for some reason to see the Doctor and the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] was just in the next building next door. And our Doctor was Captain Isaacs and his best friend was colonel major he was the psych guy down at the main hospital. Oh it was an hour of, I can't believe, so he went over and sat with Isaacs and sat with him for about ten minutes. And apparently

20:00 "And do you often get these back pains?" "Oh yes I get them all the time." This is the first time the back pains come up in the conversation, so he sent him into Vung Tau to the hospital to see that the back surgeon who was the psychiatrist. He said, you have got a bad back and sent him home. He is probably getting a pension now for a bad back, but he was yeah. And nobody notice for a while, he had been there about four or five months. But it finally surfaced.

20:30 **What would you do for recreation yourself?**

Every afternoon at 5.30 everybody that was in regimental headquarters on the Admin side was on the volleyball court and if you weren't there you had to tell me why you weren't there. And you just took your shirt off and got all hot and sweaty and nasty and then you went and had a shower and you went and had dinner. The RQ, the RQ mess the WO caterer and the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] of the workshops and I would get together and have some very hot games of

21:00 500 in my tent from time to time. But apart from that, the biggest problem I had I couldn't go to bed before 12 o'clock at night, I used to get ex cavalry report, report of ammunition standing within the batteries at midnight and then at noon and then I would have to make some phone calls do ammunition resupply in the morning, so I always had to be there till midnight. I would read. Go out and check, we had standing patrols on the various perimeters, about every second night I would check those.

21:30 But I always got the impression they were forewarned because god they were alert when I got there. So.

And what was your personnel impression about the state of the war at that stage, did you feel like that you, that progress was being made, that you were winning, what was your overall impression of the war at that stage?

Not too many problems, we were responsible, we were all over them you know. We had no problems at all, we owned it. They went out and attacked other people

22:00 and other places because we patrolled vigorously. I mean we had people in the field all the time, rainy season, dry season, night, day. We didn't give them time to move, we knew where they were. Our SAS [Special Air Service] did an enormous job in reconnaissance, basically our intelligence was excellent, we knew where to be and what to do.

And what was your impression of the way the Americans were handling the war at that stage?

Well you know, we could see the little bit around us wasn't great.

22:30 The battery we had what they were going to do wasn't good and when they burst into Cambodia I didn't think they had to do that, I think they would have done better if they burst into Laos rather than Cambodia. And although all I think they did was sort of tip the scales in Cambodia to the opposition and because they took a lot of soldiers out that could be doing things in in the gold part of the Delta and so forth than do the Cambodian thing, that wasn't a

23:00 good idea. But very good in retrospect of course. It might have been a good idea at the time. And we had a couple of soldiers in their liaison group. And one of them used to dress in our shorts and our shirt and away he went to Cambodia and I was just coming out of RHQ and in come this soldier with this big pack on his back and his rifle and his shorts and he screamed out, "Sir, sir I'm home, I'm home." He was back, and very pleased to be back.

Did you get an impression of what the

23:30 **American troops thought of the Australian soldiers?**

They thought we were very good. John Long was the brigade sergeant major of the 2nd Brigade 25th Division and they were the top of our area of operation and he thought our soldiers were excellent, and they were, they were very good. And he had a good, a good group but he had problems we didn't have at all. He and, he and his brigade commander would spend a night in the field with a company of soldiers to see how they were performing.

24:00 And you really can't have a brigadier out in forward scout it doesn't really work that way at all.

And what sort of impression did your troops have of the American soldiers?

They liked them, they got on well with them, they associated with them well. They didn't have too many problems. The bit I, I had to do I used to get on well with them. I used to go up to headquarters occasionally stay overnight and have dinner there. I went to hospital a couple of nights.

24:30 They had a big hospital in Van Tau. I went in there the day the Cambodian thing broke and the ward I

was in was the old theatre, which would have had 80 beds in it in four rows and there were three of us in it, I got a thing cut out of my eye, and there was three there that night and I heard all this noise in the middle of the night, woke up and it was full by the morning. And the young guy they put next to me had his arm up in a splint and he still had blood on his head and so forth. I said, "Are you hungry?" He said, "I haven't eaten for two days." so I fed him

25:00 his and I fed him mine and about half an hour later a helicopter landed outside and John Wayne the brigadier got out of it with his aid and walked across into the hospital and came down the rows of beds, and stopped in front of his, "Adjutant Silver Star", Purple Heart." and stamped off. I said, "Hey that his great." and he said, "My Mum will be so proud" and I said, "Yeah so am I." a good young man. That's were I'd be a bit, they had a little rest room just up from the ward and I wasn't in bed

25:30 I had this eye covered and I had to stay there four to five days and I would just go up there and get a cold coke and I'd walk to desk and I would say, "Excuse me ma'am, permission to leave the ward to get a coke." she didn't answer, I said this four times. I said, "Can't you hear me?" and she said, "Yes but I just love to hear you talk." yes. Oh dear oh dear oh dear.

Did you discuss the protest going on at home

26:00 **at all when you were over there, did that come up?**

I ignored it completely. I didn't discuss it and I don't believe the soldiers did. Some of them were probably disappointed. I am a Catholic and what I couldn't understand was the Catholics were protesting against it. They were giving up two million Catholics to communists. And I couldn't quite follow that. And that's what happened. 1975 the north shut down all the universities, the schools, the churches, sent the priests and the nuns off

26:30 for indoctrination. So yeah.

And what was your personal feelings about the communists threat at that stage in general?

I believe if Vietnam fell certainly Malaya would be, they'd have another go at Malaya, certainly they would have a go at Thailand that would fall over like a pack of cards. I mean Thailand not only had never, how could they ever beat anyone, Thailand hadn't been to war in 200 years. They would have rolled Thailand in a flash.

27:00 Laos was gone, Cambodia on the brink of going, Thailand had to be next. If they took Thailand across the border. Oh yeah, I thought the domino effect was fairly, fairly justified.

So is there anything else that we should talk about from that second tour that we haven't touched on do you think?

No I don't think so. It that tour for me was pretty much, RSM's tour, administration, discipline, morale,

27:30 make sure it all worked for the CO and don't get shot because I promised Moira I wouldn't.

Did you return to Australia satisfied with the job you had done?

Yes I did. Yeah I thought I did a pretty good job. I wasn't too excited about coming back to the RSM of the Victoria Barracks, that was a bit of a shock. But that turned out to be alright too. Yeah yeah.

Well let's talk about that?

Well I arrived back there and the guy I was taking over from was a World War II, I was sort of the front wave of the post war soldier.

28:00 I was the first post war BSM of A Battery, I was the first post war BSM of the regimental training wing, I was the first post war RSM of 4th field regiment, I was the first post war RSM of barracks and then I was the first post war RSM of school artillery. So I was the first in all those jobs.

Bit of a pioneer?

Yeah I thought so, I was certainly the front of the wave. So I got to barracks and barracks was, any large headquarters are dreadful unless you are a

28:30 clerk and wrapped in administration or you like paper. And I got there and looked around and the guy before me had been very social, socially active and really really liked the mess, he spent a lot of time in the mess with friends. And I thought god I've got to do something here to save myself here or I'll go mad. So I started taking off to the history, they have got a great library at Victoria Barracks, and all the historical things were there. And I had about six weeks to kill before he went. So I filled in, at least

29:00 half a day in the library reading about Victoria Barracks. Most interesting, most interesting. So I become a bit of a, a bit of that, so the guard change after the guard change each Tuesday there would be a group of people, anybody could go and sometimes you'd have 20 and sometimes you'd have 120. So I decided I listened to people giving a resume on Victoria Barracks and I thought it is absolutely terrible, I'll do that. So I got a little PA system and they brought it through, and I give them a history lesson on Victoria Barracks, and a 21 minute thing I would

29:30 do and then there'd be questions, and it was very grateful, I met some lovely people that would come

and talk to me afterwards and then these other guys would take them for walks around the barracks. But no that was good and I did that, the only problem there was. They had a district sergeant major who was the, the DSM of New South Wales, 2MD headquarters were there as well, and I was just, I was just the RSM of Victoria Barracks. And the general there

30:00 was General McKay, quite prominent World War II gentlemen. So I, the phone went and it was his aid, he said, "Oh RSM the general has got to go to." bloody Anthony Horden or something "Open an army display, a recruiting display and you got to go with him." I said, "No no you got the wrong guy, you got the DSM goes with him." he said, "No no no you're name is Donkin isn't it?" I said, "Yes it is." "It is you." So I rolled over there and the general rolls out of the car and I said, "Excuse me sir have you got the right man?" "Yeah, yeah you don't mean the other bloke

30:30 do you Sings?" "No." So I used to get dragged out with the general occasionally and the other guy didn't like it at all, he really really was cranky about it and he used to complain bitterly about it and it wasn't my fault. I didn't start it, I really didn't want to do it. So I used to go out with the general to these various functions and things. And then I was there two years and the camp commandant who was also major McKay got a phone call, "Come to the office, I have got something really really depressing to tell you." and I used to get on

31:00 very well with him. So I went up and said, "What's happened?" and he said, "Oh Christ read this." it was my posting to the school of artillery. And he said, "That is really depressing." Oh yeah, that means I've got to come over the harbour bridge. So I rolled over to the school and took over from Bill Story and stayed there for five years.

Just before we go into those five years, you indicated earlier that initially when you arrived at Victoria Barracks there was, it was difficult for you to get

31:30 **used to Victoria Barracks and it was a little bit difficult for Victoria Barracks to get used to you?**

The sergeants' mess had 500 honorary members, think about it. So the first thing we had to do was cull those. And I used to get some, I had been an honorary member for ten years, I looked at the entry book and your name doesn't appear in the last 12 months, oh yeah but, so we knocked all those out and the guys that we didn't knock out were the commonwealth car drivers that would come and park you on the quiet. And the

32:00 two drivers, one used to Whitlam drive oh god who was the leader of the opposition, Peacock, and they were good friends, I would have loved to be able to stand between them and listen to their conversations, they didn't talk. The police sergeant from Darlinghurst did come up with the constable and they'd have their sandwich, they'd had a schooner they would have their game of billiards in the billiard room and then they'd go back And we had a special number we could ring. And the guard would ring that number and there would be a police car there in a minute. Drag them away screaming and raving and

32:30 carrying on. So yeah.

You did a bit of spring cleaning?

Yeah yeah it needed a little bit of organisation.

Was there resistance to that?

Oh I saw Colonel Major McKay and I said, "What we've got to have, we've got to have a change from summer to winter or winter to summer dress parade." and he said, "Well that is a really good idea." so we get a change into summer a dress so I said, "Alright then." The Friday, the first day we changed is the Monday, we'll have it at 8 o'clock in the morning before people go into their

33:00 offices and it won't disturb anybody. I said, "Just all the guys line up and you walk down and I'll walk down with you and just have a quick look with you and make sure their shoes and..." There should have been about 200 or something, oh we were going to break them into groups somewhere we weren't going to do the lot ourselves. There should have been 200 and something on parade and we got 50 something. So I sent out the list for the next parade at 8 o'clock in the morning on the following Saturday. Oh you got no idea and if you couldn't make it the following Saturday perhaps the following Saturday. But most of them turned up the

33:30 following Saturday. And from then on we had these little parades, they all managed to make it on the day they were proclaimed. And of course we found that some people didn't have winter dress and some, one guy didn't have shoes he wore boots and another guy didn't have a beret. And you got a clothing allowance every pay day, they weren't spending, the business at the clothing store suddenly boomed and no it was a bit slack, needed a bit of tightening up.

So moving on from

34:00 **Victoria Barracks, as as you explained you spent five years?**

At the school and it was great, great place to be posted. You know all the people coming and going, you've met them somewhere along the line. Did some things there, did some good things I would have

thought. An old buddy of mine announced from BCOF days was getting out after thirty odd years and he was up, posted up in Enoggera and they just had a beer Friday afternoon,

34:30 they just gave him a pewter mug congratulations. So he was a bit disappointed because the pay sergeant who was going just down the road to another unit got the same farewell. I said, "If they had a warrant officer's farewell would you, would you, would you come down, would you come down to the school?" He said, "I'll be down tomorrow." So I talked to my committee and I had a very good secretary who was the PT WO 1 Brian Roberts, he said, "We'll have a WO's farewell if you've served 20 years or more." So we did and it had to be that year, we couldn't go back and we had about 20 odd people turn up.

35:00 And we did it the next year and the following year we found out the ordnance the sig [signals] and the engineers were doing it and the following year infantry and armour did it. And now everybody does it, if you have served 20 years. So we took it warrant officer to anybody, sergeant and up, members of the mess if you served 20 years or more. You get farewelled at the Corp Mess which is where North Head was and you get a little plaque. That one up there.

Lovely.

That and a few other things, changed a few things

35:30 around amenities wise and whatever. Got rid of a couple of guys that had been there too long.

Where was the school?

North Head, North Head. I would, I would, Moira ran me up a couple of mornings a week and she'd keep the car the other couple of mornings or whatever, very convenient, great. Got round to basketball, squash, played a lot of golf. But after five years I had been there. No one

36:00 should be anywhere for five years. I said I've got to move, Don Quin was the director of artillery, and I said, "I've got to get out of here." and he said, "Right." I said, "But not out of Sydney." so I moved over to Victoria Barracks, back to Victoria Barracks which is alright, I had a good job, interesting.

What was your position that time?

I was doing a captain's job for discipline and ceremonial which I, it wasn't a problem at all. And I was there for two years and Don Quin come up took me to lunch and said,

36:30 "Sorry we are posting you to Canberra in February and you are going to be the ceremonial major of the army, what do you think about that?" I said, "No no no no." so that didn't happen. The next year he come up and took me to lunch again and said, "You've got to be there by the 1st of February no later." so I turned 50, so I said now is the time to leave. So I applied for this job at the repat and got it. Veteran Affairs it is now.

Did it take long for you to find that job?

It was in the Herald and I applied and went to five interviews and they rang me one day and said, "The job's yours."

37:00 So I went and did that and I hated it. It was a straight administrative desk bound job and there was really no reason during the day for me to speak to anybody. Not a reason, I would speak to people, but there was no reason to do it. I hated that and at the end of six years they changed the system, they made me the service advisor so a Doctor would ring me up and say, "What about so and so?" typical case where a guy was claiming

37:30 anxiety state. And the Doctor, the lady Doctor said, "He only served on small ships in around the top of New South Wales, Australia up until the end of the war and six months after." So I had a quick look and it was all minesweepers so I went up to her office and I explained minesweeping, thing over the side, cut the mine pop up and fire it and spray it. She said, "I can't believe this, do you really do that, how do you know there is no mine in front of them?" "They didn't." "Alright."

38:00 So that is the sort of work I would do.

So what sort of work did you do before you did that work?

Make decisions on applications for pensions from a service, service point of view. Then at the end of the seven years they said, we are going to move all this to Canberra, not me, so I resigned. Moira and I drove to Perth for a surf carnival, came home and a guy rang me and said, "I believe you are out of work." I said, "Certainly right." "Well come and work for me." so I went to the Premiers Protocol Division in

38:30 in Sydney.

Just before we go into that one, when you were doing the repatriation did you notice any trends, did you find like particularly amongst claims being made by Vietnam Vets?

The biggest changes, within months of me joining the Fulga case came down saying that smoking was related to service. It had been denied

- 39:00 up until then. So these thousands of cases had been stood aside waiting for the High Court decision, which had taken nearly two years. And the board I was on, I was on a board with two women, two ladies. And they said, "Oh you are a good group, you've got all the cases." and of course they are enormous they have got files that high, it took us almost a year to complete them all. And that was working really hard at them, really hard. But that was the biggest change, and then some other
- 39:30 cases came up that changed Veteran Affairs ruling. But no at that stage of the game there were a lot of Vietnam cases. I did all, I did go through all the ranch hand files which agent orange to find out there was only one group of troops Australia wide that actually sprayed and that was the platoon out of 6 battalion in 1969 but no other Australian was sprayed with agent orange or the area they were in, they were sprayed with DTT in Nuidat
- 40:00 in the wet season about twice a week and sprayed the whole area for mosquitos. I'm not too sure what effect DTT has on you but.

When you started doing that work what did you miss most about the military?

Talking to soldiers, oh god I would come home, Moira said, ask Moira, she said, "For the first year there you were impossible, I was getting ready to leave and I was wondering when you were getting ready to leave." I hated it, really hated it.

But you hung in there all the same?

- 40:30 Yeah yeah. You can't turn back but I really really hated it. And when I went to protocol, it was a thing I could do, I could really do, think on my feet, make decisions, get people going.

So you found that a more satisfying prospect?

Great, great.

Can you tell us more about the nature of that work?

When I first went there, when an Ambassador comes to Australia or a High Commissioner he is given a little two day thing in every capital city, Sydney is given three days.

- 41:00 And these were pouring in, they were changing High Commissioners and Ambassadors because 88 was coming up so they were all getting their new guy in 87. So John Mill said, you take over the Ambassador tours the three day, plan them. And you've got to meet the Chief Justice, meet the Governor, meet one of the university professors, meet, be taken to lunch by one of the parliamentarians, meet the leader of the house, the council and so on and so on and anybody they want to meet, so you plan all this and
- 41:30 make sure it all ties in and a thousand phone calls to get a three day visit going. You meet all sorts of great people, you know tremendous people, the Ambassador for the Americans, the Canadians, Nigeria President General Nagoobi, who put down, put down the coup in 92, 82 as he told me. And where is the nearest golf course, so we had to play golf over the three days. He had the choice of here or Tokyo but playing golf in Tokyo was very expensive.

Tape 8

- 00:32 **Don we'll just pick up the story where Shaun left you were talking about your work in Protocol the Premiers Department?**

Right as I said in 87 I went there and started doing these Ambassador High Commissioner arrivals in Sydney. And most interesting, I would meet all sorts of very interesting people including the new Turkish Ambassador with the two escort cars, one in the front, one at the back, all armed people.

- 01:00 But it was very good and very very interesting, to hear these people talk and what they were doing. I'd get to sit in on all the interviews they would be having, well most of them anyhow. The Korean, the Korean Prime Minister came down, no the Korean President because he stayed in Government House. If you are a President or King you stayed at Government House, if you were a Prime Minister you stayed in one of the better hotels and we'd take a floor for you, we'd give you the whole floor whatever.
- 01:30 He stayed in government house, he was a bit of a problem, he brought his own security staff and wanted to carry their own guns and things and we wouldn't let them, that would cause all. Moira and I, Moira was staying over with me at the Tower block at Kings Cross, and it was about half past midnight and the phone went and it was one of the president's aids. And he played tennis that day with the Governor and he wanted to know what was the tennis court surface made of and I told him it was the new synthetic grass surface produced in Australia. And he said,
- 02:00 "Thank you very much" and hung up. Moira said, "How did you find that out". I said, "I haven't the faintest idea what the surface is made out of." But he seemed happy about it, but this is the sort of thing, you know half past 12 at night, what is the surface of the tennis court made of?

So your role was just to be have general knowledge of anything and everything?

Yeah, yeah. You were an events officer. You were one of Protocol staff and they say this is your event, or part of this is your event. With Prince Charles and Diana I had the surf carnival at

02:30 Terrigal. Which obviously being the coordinator of Queenscliff surf carnival for some 20 years. I could sort of do that, it was a mini surf carnival and I had to hand over the Young Endeavour. I did something else for them, but I can't. I was the events officer for that, I had other people with me, but I was the one that had to coordinate it. For the Yorks had the opening of the place out the other side of Liverpool Campbelltown the what I can't remember the name of it now, the gardens, something gardens. And

03:00 the church service at Liverpool on the Sunday morning at 9 o'clock was the second oldest church in Australia and they were going there for the church. When the lady kept stepping over everybody and putting her daughter out on the foot on the part they were going to walk up I had to go and tell her to move that baby back. But rightly or wrongly the Duchess of York was going to have to step over that kid. Funny. Very amusing. And then of course 88 all these people started arriving. And one of the nicest people that I have ever had anything to do with was King Carlos from Spain. But then again if you have been a republic

03:30 for X years and they have a referendum and bring you back as the King you have got to have a lot going for you and he did, he did, he was a really nice guy. Very nice bloke.

Was he, did he talk to you?

Oh yeah, yeah, he'd sit and talk. We were on the Captain Phillip going back up under the bridge to go to Darling Harbour to have his official farewell and then he would leave for the airport. And coming behind us was a big barge full of Spanish photographers and reporters all yelling and

04:00 screaming and we were up on this little bridge with the skipper and he was up there because he was smoking a big cigar. And he looked back at this barge and he said, "Oh Mr Donkin if we had a machine gun we could fix that problem." fairly humorous. Margaret Thatcher is probably is the best speaker I have ever heard. The King, the Queen is the most punctual person in the world. I mean if they say the Queen will step out the doorway at 1 minute past 8 she will step out the doorway at 1 minute past 8. Regardless.

04:30 But very interesting year. But that finished unfortunately. Well it was always going to finish eventually and it did. And then in 89 I used to go back and did bits and pieces for him. The Russian Prime Minister come out and went back and did a bit for there. And someone else come out and oh the second, the second tier of the Olympic games, this is the committee made up from all the athletes, all the branches, rowing, yachting whatever and the.

SOCOG?

No not SOCOG. The Prince

05:00 of Monaco, the Prince or something he was the boss of sailing and he was there. And we had the whole floor of the Intercontinental Hotel as a place to have bickies and drinks and things. So I took a fairly big part in that organising, not the meeting but the Protocol side of it. Moving around and whatever. And then one day it was winter and I was getting on the express bus that goes just outside to go to work and one bus had missed coming and I was getting on one that was very crowded and it was very wet. And I got halfway into the city and I thought why in the hell am I doing this.

05:30 So I got in there and finished a bit of a job he had me doing and it only took me a couple of hours to finish it off and I said, "Come on John I'll take you to lunch." he said. "What is the occasion?" I said, "It is a farewell lunch". So we went and had lunch together, a fairly long lunch and I left and come home and never went back.

So you were obviously financially well off enough not to have that decision worry you, to be able to make that decision?

Well surprisingly the army superannuation if you served long enough turned out, turned out very well, very good.

06:00 And then I worked for the Commonwealth and because I was over 55 there was a small pension out of that. Yeah yeah we did alright out of it. We sort of organised our, our later years. Better than a lot of people, better than our friends.

Is it common for people in the army to get a job in protocol, was that a common pathway to take?

No no not but it happens, yeah it happens, it did for me, John Miller was my last boss in the army. And he got the job

06:30 he always says because we buried the GOC from the church opposite Parliament House it went so well he said, the people up in the Black Stump which was the state office block were watching and said, "He's our man." So he reckons that is how he got the job at that funeral, which I was involved in. But no not necessarily. I don't think there is army people now in it. But it was interesting, very interesting job to be involved with. Being in the state office block and coming in on the Monday morning when the government's change. That is the most

07:00 scariest thing you can imagine.

Which government change can you tell us?

The Labour government stopped being and Nick Griener came in. Where we were we had three car spaces, and our three company cars, and just over from it were two big paper munchers, and they used to have big hesian bags on a frame and they would take about I suppose about three or four weeks to fill these bags. And I come in on a Monday morning, early because I had a thing on in a company car and there were four of those bags full and there were paper everywhere. They were whacking the files through with the binders still on them.

07:30 Yeah most interesting. Another exciting scene. But that was it. I was pretty pleased with my life and with my Moira and our kids. Chris went to Portsea and did 20 years and retired a major and works for Roach. Wendy is a graduate of Sydney Uni, Bachelor of Education and still teaches at Terrigal. Karen is graduate of Sydney Teachers College and teaches at North Curl Curl and lives there.

08:00 Tim left school and went to work in the bank and said it was absolutely terrible and couldn't stand the rude customers so he did other things and his own business for a while and now this and he is quite happy what he is doing. They all bought their own homes. Yeah one, one started (UNCLEAR) at the moment, one grandchild he is 21. And Kristy who is seven, so there is nine of them. Yeah.

So what do you think the army taught you, looking back, reflecting now?

Respect,

08:30 fellowship, look after people, if you are given in charge of people mind them. First them, hat was the old theory the men on horses first then yourself, that was the lighthouse. Feed the men and horses and then feed yourself. Yeah I think, I think respect is probably the biggest thing, respect other peoples views, other peoples ways. Whether you like it or not.

09:00 And don't do anything unkind to people if you can avoid it.

Talking about helping other people you you actually were awarded an American Bronze, can you tell us why you were, what it is and why you were and tell us the story about that?

I am sure that Floyd Thompson wrote the citation initially. And Captain Iron followed it through, and there was a colonel, a half colonel in the B team and I think

09:30 he was the guy that pushed it on because it wasn't happening in those days and it took years to happen, years to happen and eventually it did. And there is a citation on the wall, and there were a couple of citations and they were worded a couple different ways so two people had a go at it. But that that came out of Khe Sanh.

Can you tell us the particular incident that you think?

Oh think most of the fact the missions I lead. One of the things with Khe Sanh they had, they had sic, three, seven

10:00 mortars. They had three 81 ml mortars they stood about that high and would fire about 4,500 metres and they had four little ones 60mm and they would fire about 2,500 metres and when I got there if you wanted to fire in the one spot you had to run around and say, "Everyone fire at the big tree over there." This is bloody ridiculous so I got some boards, got some maps, made them up, circled them with my protractor, one did one for each mortar. Went out and the ones that I could fire that wouldn't actually hurt anybody

10:30 would actually fire at different things and range them in. Not all on the one day on different days when the fields were clear. And eventually I could pick up, we had a phone to each bunker where they were now, I could pick up the phone "Fire six now" or "Fire five bombs on six now" and they would all look at six turn to it on the bearing, turn to it on the range and they would all fire at point six. And then you could adjust from point six up and down or whatever. They thought that was the best thing since canned beer. But I was a gunner, that was my business you know.

And in America what

11:00 **where does the American Bronze stand in the scheme of medals, like where?**

As far as I know it goes Congressional Medal of Honour, Silver Star, Bronze Star, Soldiers Medal.

Now would it be unusual for a person that wasn't American to be awarded something like that?

No in Korea there were several bronze stars and silver stars awarded and as far as and Australians weren't allowed to wear them. And it is only just now in the last three years that people are being allowed to wear

11:30 their silver medal and their bronze stars, or their Vietnamese medal. Because it is a bit hard to wear the Vietnamese medal now because there isn't any North Vietnam. No it is, they are, they were a bit funny about it for a while. I've got a letter from the secretary the chief of general staff, colonel Hines I think it

was. And it writes to me and he says, "We are so pleased to hear that you have just been awarded the bronze star blah blah blah you realise under paragraph such and such neither can you accept or wear it."

12:00 boom boom. Yeah but. But not to matter.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day? Is it necessary does it mean much to you?

You are talking the man that was the Deputy Marshall of Anzac Day for 20 years.

Really, oh this is another surprise for us.

Yeah I wasn't the Deputy Marshall for 20 years, that is a lie, I was a Marshall for about seven or eight years and then was the Deputy Marshall and my boss at protocol John

12:30 Marshall, John Miller was the Marshall. So we used to, I organised the all the bit north of Martin Place and somebody else organised the bit south of Martin Place. And I used to get over there, Moira and I would stay at the Castlereagh Inn at the Masonic Club there. I would get up at 6 in the morning get dressed and go to the meeting at Martin Place at 7 and get people organised and run around and sort out people and sort out people that were going crook, and mothers that wanted their girls to march in tights and spin batons on a Remembrance Day

13:00 parade and I would get in double and get nasty letters from them because their daughter was the New South Wales champion and that sort of thing, champion. So after a while, after 20 years of this I thought this is enough so I retired or resigned. Now Moira and I still go to Anzac Day but we don't get up at 6 o'clock anymore we get up at about 8.30 go and have a very leisurely breakfast and at about 10.30 or 11 o'clock I wander down and meet my friends.

And it is a special day?

It is yeah yeah. And the last, the last

13:30 Anzac Day Nick and Karen and Tim and Wendy come over with their kids and Moira had warned me out about it. So I told them when they came, we turn into the last, Sussex Street what is the last street, the one past the Town Hall, whatever, when they turned out make sure they weren't in the... Moira normally waits in the last block for me. I said, "Make sure they are down about they are down past Pitt Street, give them a couple of hundred metres." So they did that and as soon as they got there I yelled out, "Come on." We formed the back rank of the Training Team. And we marched and Zac who is fifteen,

14:00 he is fifteen now but he was 14 then finished the march and went back to his Mum, "I was so proud." and they all were, they all marched the lot of them. The training guys said, "He has brought his bloody own army."

What are your thoughts on a lot of the Vietnam Vets who didn't march for years, what is your opinion on that and why that may have happened?

How could you have an opinion on that?

Makes you angry or?

No. No if they don't

14:30 want to march, be my guest, I haven't got an opinion on it no no.

Do you think, after you said you were working out whether the some of the Vietnam Vets got compensation you were at the rehabilitation office, which is now the Department of Vets Affairs?

Vet Affairs yeah.

Did you think that some of the Vets you know Vietnam Vets claiming money for various things did you think that was, did you feel that was right and correct or

15:00 **did you agree with it?**

When I was working there I used to go to the monthly meeting in Dee Why RSL because I was asked to. And when I get there I would give them a little five minute spiel on what was happening in Veteran Affairs now. And each month I would tell them the same thing, if you were going to make a claim, you've got to have a complaint. You can't write in and say I feel really sick or my leg really hurts, or I've.... You have got to have a complaint, some doctors say he's got a really sore leg. And people say, "but but but."

15:30 I said, "No there has got to be something the matter with you, you can't say give me a pension, why, well everyone's got one haven't they? It doesn't work that way." oh gee wiz that wasn't a good idea at all. But if you've got something wrong with you and it really is wrong with you and it is related to your service of course the system is there, the system is not against them it is for them. Some of them get in touch. I was out, I had a cancer thing going

16:00 and I had it removed from me when I was going to this bloody ward 16 at Concord once a month for review and they changed it and I had to go to another ward. And it is pretty full, full of old sick people

all with cancer. And there was another ward, this reception desk was handling two wards and there is this young guy there I suppose he was in his late twenties, early thirties. And he is going off his head he is waving his arms he has been waiting half an hour he'd been up and down and, "Oh the shells are coming." and oh. I walked in and said, "What are you

16:30 going on about?" He said, "Ohhh." I said, "Come on outside." So I dragged him outside and we went and sat on the seat. "What is the matter?" "Oh you have got no idea how terrible it was, the women and children were killed and I was involved with it." Oh yeah, "What unit were you with?" "168 transport." Now the only people that would be fighting him would be the kids that were trying to cross the road when he was driving too fast. Didn't hit him, could have, thought about it.

Did you tell him you had been in Vietnam after that?

No, waste of time.

17:00 All the problems he had he had long before he got to Vietnam.

Did you, did you, did Vietnam affect you emotionally or mentally, did it leave scars on you that you found hard to deal with you later on in life?

You haven't been listening. I'm a regular soldier.

So.

Regular soldiers don't get scars from doing their job. Not at all.

They are not meant to?

17:30 Why would you if you are doing the job that you are trained for. You know it is a mental thing, am I doing the job I was trained for, am I doing it right? No I am doing it wrong I must change what I am doing. I don't have sleepless nights, I never wake up screaming. Pretty nervous when I got back the first time, bit strung up but I think that was mostly because I was sick.

So what are your views then on

18:00 **people with post-traumatic stress syndrome that come back from Vietnam?**

People can have post-traumatic stress that come back from Sydney. If they have from Vietnam, they have a problem. People come back from work and they have it. Bus drivers probably get it. Ambulance people that go to nasty accidents must get it. Fireman and all sorts of people have it. I don't think it is a disease you only get when you come back from Vietnam.

A lot of Vietnam vets are suffering from that?

18:30 Why?

I don't know. I'm putting the questions to you.

I don't know either, I don't know why, what is their problem.

How do you think the army has changed from when you enlisted to now, what are the major changes in the army that you can see given your long history?

The major changes. The food, I mean when I joined the army they didn't have a catering corps, any fella that could cook got to work in the kitchen. And they got a

19:00 catering corps and they started training people how to prepare food. I mean the food was probably always good it just got ruined in the process. Change in food, change in pay. When I went to Vietnam for the first time they gave me 13 and 6 a day find your three meals and a bed. If I was stationed at a CMF unit Dubbo I would get 13 and 6 a day, it was the country allowance. The Americans were being paid \$65 a month Vietnam allowance.

19:30 This is special forces, \$38 a month jump pay, \$32 a month combat pay and \$9 a day pre diem plus their pay, which was pretty good anyhow. So when we buy stuff for the team. The two the young, the young second lieutenant he would keep all the bills. And at the end of the month he would work out what we bought and he would say, "Oh we all owe X dollars each." And it was the second month I was there with Rick.

20:00 The first time we didn't do that the second time we did. And he said, "Oh you fellas you guys are up for 25 bucks each." "Oh gee that sounds alright." pay him 25 bucks. But he always, the second month he said, "You are up for \$24 this month." We always noticed he always asked us when there were no Americans around because they'd had a meeting hadn't they but we only paid a third of whatever they paid, yeah. We only found out after the third go and we said to him, "Please don't tell anybody you know, it is supposed to be a secret." "Ok".

So the pays got better,

20:30 **the food?**

And needles. When they go to give you an injection now and they give you a needle you can hardly feel it. When I joined the army in 1947 oh god you could feel it. And training, training. Radios I mean when I joined A Field battery they had 20 radios and two of them worked never at the same time, so it was no point talking to each other. Vehicles you know from the old chev

- 21:00 ford blitz to now, the things they use. The gun, there is probably a better gun, but we had 25 pounders. It has got to be the best field gun they ever built. Really really good, the guns fire further now and they fire better.

What about the camaraderie is it better now or do you think it was better back when you joined?

I had to go over to Georges Heights before Christmas, I was invited to A Field Battery's 120th anniversary or something. And they had it at Georges at Heights because they asked Parks and Wildlife if they

- 21:30 could have it there, and they had it down the old Garrison officers mess, which is empty, not used for anything, why someone hasn't rented it as a restaurant I don't know. Magic views of Sydney. And they had their cooks come in and prepare it all. And I was being invited. And about a day before it was supposed to be on this young lieutenant rang me and said, "You are coming Mr Donkin?" I said, "Yes I'm coming." he said, "You do know you are the guest speaker." I said, "Well what do you want me to talk about?" He said, "Anything you want". So I talked about me joining A Field Battery. And these

- 22:00 are all the A Field Battery is the airborne battery, they are in the airborne battle group, and they are all, the one hundred and ten of them are all fit out of their tiny minds. All good looking guys all strapping, all parachuters and all tough and I thought the camaraderie amongst them was unbelievable. It was great to stand there and look at them. And when I finished talking I must have been back against the wall for 20 minutes or more while they all asked me, what about so and so what about, no yeah it was great.

- 22:30 Great feeling.

So what did they want to know about Vietnam or Korea?

No they wanted to know about A Field Battery in Japan the occupation, the palace guard and you know, they wanted to know all about that. They didn't want to Vietnam, they wanted to know about the palace guard and they wanted to know a bit about Korea. How did, how did the TARA sergeant from baker troop field A Battery become the platoon sergeant of 11 platoon don company. How could that possibly happen, because 3 battalion is an airborne battalion, so they know about 3 battalion.

- 23:00 Yeah how could that be? Yeah that was good enjoyed that. Enjoyed it all.

Did you.

Yeah.

What was, you mentioned Moira all the way through, what was her support, you know why was it so important to you?

Good army wives are hard to find, I was just lucky. Yeah, she always knows what I was, I was a soldier, always supported me, didn't really, you know wasn't that excited about going to wars and

- 23:30 things. We sat down once and we thought, oh we must have had very little to do with our time that day, we decided how long we were separated for, you could only count it if it was a month or more, it had to be a full month, it couldn't be two weeks, and we went through and were picking out oh six weeks at Singleton, and over a period of time and we reckon it was about 7 ½ years. In the 33.

That is a long time.

No counting and there was, there must have been the odd two weeks in there somewhere but we didn't count those and we didn't count

- 24:00 five days and four days. But certainly nearly eight years yeah. And she always said, as I went out the front door the problems come in the back door. One of them got the measles or the car didn't work or you know something. We had a Ford Prefect and she said, "I can just see it now in Manly park and of course I've just done the shopping and the battery has gone again and I'm pregnant and I'm cranking it." Oh dear, oh dear.

- 24:30 **What do you think of women in the army or in the services in general, do you think that is a good idea?**

I have no problem, I have a bit problem with women in combat units. I can't see it being a good idea at all and anybody that says it is a good idea, isn't looking at the situation it really truly is. The big problem there is they are women, and I can visualise these two people in the fox hole together and one is the man and one is, and there are all sorts of

- 25:00 problems there without letting your mind race you know. Pass the point, no doubt they would be as brave as a man, no doubt they could shoot as well as a man, none at all. But the Israelis come up with the answer in 1948. The little sister syndrome. They're going into combat and the women are fighting

shoulder to shoulder, women gets hurt, knocked over by a bullet, eight guys go back to help her and there is the problem, and the answer is the motto is "win the fight help the wounded."

25:30 So you've got this (UNCLEAR) to help the women and they will, it is nature. If a bloke gets knocked over you leave him until you've won the fight. But no I have no problem with women in service at all. And fighting fighter aircraft or being on ships not a problem, but being in, but being in the foxhole in the front, I've got a problem with that. And but the Russian women were doing it. Did you see some of the Russian women that were doing it?

26:00 Yeah. Oh dear oh dear.

When you look back what was probably the highlight of your military career?

I thought carrying the flag in France, down the Champs Elysees. With the band playing Waltzing Matilda until we got to the saluting post and we arrived rising to Advance Australia Affair, we were all ten foot high. And the crowd, the French crowd went absolutely berserk.

26:30 Four of our soldiers were in a big department store after the parade the next day. The day we had off, the day on leave, and a security guy comes up and says, "You are the Australian soldiers aren't you?" "Yes yes yes we are." "Come with me immediately." into the elevator onto the top floor, lunch with the store manager, he'd seen them in security with their slouch hats on. And some very nice ones too, very popular and Villers-Bretennoux was enormously popular with the people there. Over at the war cemetery

27:00 there is all sorts of Australian cemeteries but the official war cemetery is at Villers-Bretennoux, and we were there and one of the people with the air force contingent is a retired group captain I think he was. But he was still doing things on the reserve air force and he was, he was, I was with Danny Neville a friend of mine, he was one of the escorts for the colour and he was over there in the cemetery and he is standing on his own. So we walked over, "G'day sir what is the problem?" He said, "I'm just meeting a couple of old friends." and they were four airmen their headstones, he said, "They were my crew, we were shot down

27:30 about ten mile from here." He said, "I got out and the free French got me back into Spain and back into, but they were killed on the plane coming down." And I thought oh you know. And we were walking back out to get back on the buses and there is an old Frenchman with the long coat and a beret on and Danny gets to the door and he grabbed Danny by the arm and said, "They will be so pleased you came." yeah but how, I've been a soldier and

28:00 how anybody could let the western front happen is quite beyond me. How you could tell ten thousand guys to leap out of trenches and charge and have no absolutely no hope. Or charge at the neck in Gallipoli, oh you wonder.

Who was your most admired military person?

My most? Monash. Monash.

Why?

Because he was brilliant, he was a brilliant commander. He was a brilliant commander of lots of troops, lots of soldiers,

28:30 lots and lots of soldiers. And he proved, he was probably the most brilliant commander on the western front. In World War I. And he was a brilliant man whatever he did, all the things that he did. And I've read his book twice. It is a bit heavy going but it is well worth reading.

Did you try and take some lessons from him in in?

I never did anything high enough to emulate him, he was moving divisions I moved platoons. And the planning

29:00 that went into it you know. Planning always interested me. There is a book I read it years and years ago. And it was about the logistic planning for D Day and everyone says D Day read the planing that went into it, absolutely unbelievable. There is some pretty brilliant blokes that never got to land on the beach but they were behind and made it happen. No Monash would be my, be my man. Later day, I've been with some good friends with Generals -

29:30 I think Cosgrove is an excellent general for today's army.

Why is that?

He is a man's man, he's a soldier's soldier, he knows about soldiers. And on Anzac Day when he marches, he was in 8th battalion I think it was, he doesn't march in front of 8th battalion, he marches back with his company because he was a lieutenant in the company. So he doesn't, the general of the navy air force now the general of defence force but he still marches with his company and I think that is good.

What is your opinion on Australia being

30:00 **involved in Iraq, the Iraq war now?**

I bet if you lined up all the soldiers that went and asked them do you want to go or not go they would all say, "I want to go." Who wants to train for the football game for five years and never get a game? And the only way to get a game is, I mean it has only got to be the one person fire one bullet over your head and you've been in action. And that is what all

30:30 infantry soldiers want to do, otherwise they wouldn't be there. The cause, topping the Iraqi government surely had to be a good thing, what people talk don't come to grips to the fact that the third of the Iraqis were the Muslims of Saddam's ilk and the other two thirds weren't, the other two thirds were getting repressed. And that is why there is a problem there at the moment because the third that has been overthrown don't not

31:00 like being the bosses. And people don't read into that, not see it. No I think knocking, knocking Iraq over is probably the right idea. Libya soon come to the party didn't they. Old Gadaffi said, "Oh I want to be a good guy." because he thought gee I will be here with the marine division the next minute. And Libya wouldn't be half as difficult as what Iraq was. No I think it was a good idea, and all the people, our people that went was a good idea.

31:30 The only thing I would have envied about Afghanistan and Iraq was the money they were being paid. Would I like a bit of that? Yeah money was excellent.

What about the US troops over there do you have an opinion on what they are going through?

The American army has improved dramatically since they stopped the drafts some many years ago. And it is a regular army now. We had a, a bloke that was in the Training Team was a professor of defence or something at the university in Queensland.

32:00 And when the first Iraqi was on he pointed out that most of the half of the American army were Negroes and they hadn't even been to combat and the Iraqi army had been fighting Iran for seven years and they would get rolled and steam rolled, and he was on the radio I listened to him. And this was his summation of how the war would go. And they rolled over in four days. We have never heard from him again. No one has ever interviewed him ever again. He got that very wrong.

Alright

32:30 **this is your chance to say something, given that these tapes are going to be around for posterity and you have had a long and interesting career what sort of advice would you like to give to future generations given your experience?**

Well first of all I've enjoyed my life. I have been very lucky to have Moira. I've been very lucky to have the sons and daughters and grandkids that we've got. We are very lucky we have got a nice house, it is not a mansion but it is a nice house.

33:00 And we live near the beach and we like to surf, all the kids do. And we've seen a bit of the world, we've been around and had a bit of a look and decided there is only one place to live. I would say to future generations, there's got to be more discipline and there's got to be more respect. If you want to be respected you've got to give it. If you want people to do things for you, you've got to do things. There is too many people complaining about

33:30 oh the system is too hard, it is too difficult, I can't make it, they've made it too hard. There is too many people whinging and not enough people doing. Basically in this country you can do anything you wanted to if you get off your bottom. And the chances of good education now are overwhelmingly good. I mean you haven't got to go to work when you are 13. But if I, if one thing I could change I would change, my life I would

34:00 change that. I would endeavour as a young man to get a better education. But there was never any opportunity. So I had to overcome it as I went along. When the people were having a beer after lessons I was in there learning how to do it.

What about recommending young people for a military career do you think, would you recommend anyone to do it, or do you think some people aren't cut out for that?

I was talking to a guy from Kapooka a couple of years ago this was. And he said, the biggest problem they had

34:30 was getting people to do as they were told, he said, not that they were disobedient just that they never had to do as they were told. There was no habit there. So he said they had to devise little things like shoot changes between 6.45 and 7. Door closed right on 7 you arrived too late, haven't changed your shoot, remove your movie pass, because there's a big movie theatre there and a different movie every night and you can't get in without your pass. They take your pass off you for three days. So you think I better be on time. And little things

35:00 turn up. The mess hall, the mess hall doors close half a minute after a meal starts. You arrive a minute, you don't get dinner. He said all these little things, they are not big things. No one is flogged no one is whatever, just these little things to improve you to get on time. And he said, after a couple of weeks not a problem. He said, those that get home sick and really want to get home, he said we send them home for three days. They find it hasn't changed, it is just the same, they come back.

35:30 He said it is not like teaching them to be soldiers, you've got to teach them to be human beings and then teach them to be soldiers which may there is a problem. I guess, I guess Dads and Mums are a bit to pay for that and I say that every day. I see people that can't control their three year old child. They are never going to be able to control their 13 year old child, they are going to have absolutely no hope at all with their 16 year old. You know so they wonder why when they turn 16, he won't do anything I ask him.

36:00 He has never done anything you asked him what is the difference.

Do you think national service would be a good solution to discipline like that?

Oh yes wipe all the problem kids get them in the army and sort it out, Mums and Dads can't. Could you afford it? I was part of a study back in 19, I just got to school I think what 73, 75. And they were doing a sort of study and you were given little bits to do. And I had a tiny bit to do and I had to do it. But I saw the results. To have a national service

36:30 where we would call up, there was only ten thousand a year I think yeah four call ups, there might have been 2,000 at a time, but it wasn't a lot of people much the same as the lottery system, or you could volunteer to go in. And if you volunteer you would get war service homes, it would be for 18, it would be for 18 months I think it was or 15, I forget now. I think it was three months training and a year in a unit. And so on and so forth. It was going to cost something like and back in those days, something about

37:00 \$800 a head to do this. And that was without infrastructure, that was without building buildings and things. So it would be three times that now. So I don't think the taxpayers would want to put their hand up high and quick. Or don't worry about it. But I hear it every second day on the radio. If we had national service it would be different. No it wouldn't because the guys that have to be changed round wouldn't join would they, you wouldn't get them there in a fit.

What about the threat of terrorism to Australia when you

37:30 **were operating in Vietnam it was communism and now it is terrorism is the big issue, military issue for us is?**

Well people have forgotten Doctor Sukarno, he was sitting there looking for support and he suddenly found the support of some 4 ½ million communists living in Indonesia. Now immediately when Soeharto rolled along there is probably some still in camps in the middle of Java somewhere, at one stage of the game they put the figure at one hundred thousand people were interned.

38:00 There was probably the biggest threat ever to Australia and Australia ignored it, it couldn't possibly happen to us. I guess we always thought the Pacific Ocean would stop everything. I think that it is probably a bigger threat now in Australia for terrorism than there has ever been because of the people that are here. Because of the beliefs of people. And if we keep an eye on it yeah we will handle it. But

38:30 It's here.

Ok we are almost out of tape is there anything you would like to add or you think there is something we haven't covered that?

Thank you for your patience. No, thank you for coming. I, Whatever I've had to say if that can be of help to anybody you know I'm pleased, I'm pleased. But I have no frightening words of wisdom to pass down because no one would listen anyhow.

39:00 **Alright.**

INTERVIEW ENDS