Australians at War Film Archive

Sydney Webster (Syd) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **It would be good if you could give us a bit of a life story.**

I am Syd Webster. I was born in Hornsby in 1932, son of Pommy immigrants. In my early life they moved around before settling in a place called Carlingford at the outbreak of the Second World War. I did most of my schooling at Carlingford.

01:00 My mother died when I was pretty young and I went working with my father around the Morisset, Mandalong, Wyong district. Following bush accidents there I became unemployed there and went to Melbourne, worked down there for eighteen months or more and came back and enlisted in the army in 1950 and I served for twenty-seven-odd years and I served in Korea,

01:30 two terms in Malaya and Vietnam. One of the tours of Malaya included the Borneo campaign. Changed from infantry at that stage into army aviation, did air traffic control training and settled in Toowoomba at the end of my service.

02:00 **How did your parents find the transition from England?**

I can only go on hearsay because they came out in 1926 and I wasn't born until '32, and by the time I came cognisant with it most of that transition was pretty much over. But because he wasn't a tradesman and it was the Depression years they found things

02:30 pretty tough. I believe they farmed and did droving and all those type of things. And my Mum was from Lancashire and she found it pretty hard. My father had service and all that type of thing and consequently he was used to roughing it, so I think it was much harder on my mother than it was my father.

03:00 Overall it was a pretty tough trip.

Your father was in the army?

He was in the British Army. Again hearsay, but he served in India and he was in the artillery and he had shall we say the unique privilege of witnessing the Australians at Beersheba. He…

03:30 At the end of that campaign he went back to France and he got wounded in France, but other than that he did fight right through the First World War and got through it all right.

What would be your earliest memories from your childhood?

My very earliest memories of when we were in one of our houses in Sydney. We lived in a little old workers'

04:00 cottage where St Margaret's Hospital in Sydney now stands. I remember snippets of that. And we also lived in Parramatta. I remember more of that but I would say that Jesmond Place as it was called would be my earliest memories.

What can you remember about how the Depression impacted your family?

Not much. I can't really on impact.

04:30 I don't ever remember starving or anything like that but I do remember there wasn't a lot of clothing spare and things like that, and I think Mum had a fairly hard time making ends meet. I don't really remember a lot of it but from what I gather we were coming out of it at the end or the beginning of the Second World War, and I was only seven when it started so I really don't remember

05:00 much of it.

Was there things that your mother longed for from England?

That I don't know, whether she actually longed for anything. She used to write to England and one of her correspondents was Gracie Fields. They went to school together. But other than longing I don't think she ever

05:30 said, "I miss the greenery," or, "I miss the larks," or whatever they do over there, but I don't think she never ever seemed to be that. She used to sing a lot and all that type of thing but I don't think she ever emphasised any great longing. They used to call it the Old Dart. I never found out the origin of that but I don't think she ever really longed for the place.

06:00 **Can you tell me about wartime in Sydney?**

We lived at Carlingford. All the family, except a sister and a brother older than me, and of course myself, were in the army and that included brothers-in-laws and that kind of thing. And we lived at Carlingford and my eldest sister

06:30 lived in Bondi Junction and we used to visit her now and again, and I used to be able to sit on the edge of the tubs in the laundry and look out the laundry window at the ships in the harbour, a fair distance, but I was able to. I can remember seeing, I think it was the Lusitania, the Aquitania, and the Queen Mary. I think they were the three. Always later there were lots of

07:00 soldiers or servicemen around and I can remember the night the. A little bit… I am a bit hazy. I am not sure whether it was an aeroplane or the submarine attack, but you could hear the sirens going everywhere and things like that. We were really country bumpkins because Carlingford in those days was just a rural district; it wasn't a

07:30 a town or anything. It had just a post office and a couple of little shops. I can remember once a lot of the neighbours, we lived on the opposite side of the ridge from Sydney and if you got to this ridge you could look out all over Sydney, a magnificent view, and these people got it in their head that we would all walk up onto the top of the ridge at Pennant Hills Road

08:00 and look at the blackout. That is the main type of thing. I remember Mum battling with coupons. You had to have coupons for meat, sugar, I am not sure about butter. And every person had a folder of coupons. And a pound of tea would take so many coupons, and the butcher and the grocer there with his pair of scissors cutting coupons out,

08:30 and Mum having to account for all the little things that needed coupons and things of such nature. The fellows coming home on leave. Now and again our postman, well mainly in the main my sister did it once, the postman or post person was a girl on horseback and they used to make a special trip

09:00 to take the telegrams. Carlingford was… We seemed to fare not real well because I lost a brother, but he was an exception, and the chap down the road, he was another exception in as much as they went to the desert. With those two exceptions, nearly all our boys went

09:30 to the 8th Division. We had a fairly high casualty rate. The woman next door to us, she sent three sons away and she got one back. There are a few others that lost a lot,

10:00 lots of lads, and some of them were maimed and all that. They are the main memories I think that I would have of the war years.

How old were you when your brother joined up?

I would be just on seven. All of them started to join up. It was declared

10:30 in September and by Christmas they were just about all in the army. Dad and the eldest brother tried to join up as brothers and, fortunately or otherwise, they ran into the family doctor and he pulled the old man out of it straight away because he was too old and he wouldn't have made it.

11:00 He wanted to join up with my brother. And my brother was subsequently killed in El Alamein. They were all in the army by Christmas '39, January '40. They were all in by then.

What can you remember about him deciding to join up and coming home in his uniform?

Virtually nothing. It is just

11:30 that the war was declared and everyone was in; it was as simple as that. I was too young to be included in any discussions or anything like that. It was just they didn't go to work one day. They were all into the recruiting, that was it. In Parramatta in those days they didn't have enough accommodation and the wherewithal so

12:00 they were what they called the day boys. They used to come home at night and go to work in the morning and train and come home at night and then it started. One day, if I remember rightly, one came home with a pair of pants, the hat, and one came home with a pair of boots I think it was.

12:30 Then in dribs and drabs they got their uniform, and the army being what it is they commanded they wear what pieces they had. And to see them going off to work with bits and pieces of the uniform – talk about a ragtag army! That was it. And eventually they were all equipped and then went to Lancer

Barracks as far as I can understand,

13:00 which is just a reception and basic recruiting depot, and from there they were sent to places like Ingleburn and Wallgrove and things like that to do their basic training and allocated to units. But in the main they were all in just these dribs and drabs of uniforms.

Can you remember the first time you saw your brother in his full uniform?

It would be,

13:30 I suppose it would be within February March, maybe April or something in the 1940 because each day he went to day boys and he would say, "I don't know whether I will be home tonight Mum." And one night he never come home and we said, "He must have gone to camp." And then some time after that he came home and he was

14:00 in full uniform. I think from memory he was at Wallgrove and I think my father went to Liverpool as opposed to Ingleburn, and I think two of my brothers went to Liverpool with my father. I suppose that would have been February March, after a month or two, after this day boy business. In those days it wasn't much to see in a uniform; it was a very

14:30 plain dowdy uniform they had. I suppose that would be about it.

Did you have a send off?

The community at some time, I can't remember when that was, had a send off for all the boys and they all got, a lot of people call them a money belt and a lot of people call them a blow belt. And

15:00 they had a belt about yay wide and it had pockets and you open the end of it and it became tubular, and the idea was that you put any notes in there and you blew it and it went down the belt. Most of the fellows got that. The other thing was a leather watchband and it had a cap over the watch so the enemy couldn't see the watch.

15:30 Everyone, I don't think they gave them a wallet but I remember the blow belt and the watch thing they gave all the fellows. The hall has been knocked down and they used to call it the Memorial Hall in Carlingford and that was the send off. Because every home had their own individual send off because not everyone went away at the same time.

16:00 That was the main send off that I remember.

Can you remember what he said to you as he left?

Not really, mainly, "If I come home and you haven't done what Mum told you, I will boot your ring [kick you in the backside]."

16:30 He was fairly revered bloke and I can't remember what he said a lot of. He just said, "I will boot your ring if you don't do what Mum tells you," and, "I will send you some souvenirs." When his effects came home

17:00 there was some German and Italian badges in it for me that he had been saving up. That is about all I can remember about that.

Had you received much correspondence from him?

He used to write to Mum. There seemed to me the main affinity was between him and Mum, in hindsight,

17:30 and he used to write to her as regularly as he could and she used to write regularly to him. We got a fair bit, the normal, possibly one letter a week or two letters a week. All mail in those days was by ship, was very little by air,

18:00 and with wartime restrictions they got the mail whenever they could. You would get two or three letters one week and none for a month or something. I do remember after he was killed that we got letters that he had sent a sent a couple of months after he was killed in 1942, and we were still getting mail as late as June '43

18:30 after the 9th Division came home. I think it was all due to the mail system more than anything else.

If it is okay to ask, how did you as a young boy seeing your brother going off and then subsequently killed,

19:00 **through a child's mind, how did you see the war?**

You must remember that it was a full scale war and therefore there was tremendous propaganda all the time: the Germans were dreadful people and you couldn't get much worse until the Japs came in and of course they were worse people still. And there was a

19:30 there was a lot of heavy public propaganda about how bad these people were and you got it. All the

schools were raising money in every way they could for war bonds. Everybody was screaming war bonds to defeat these dreadful people and all that and when… And of course all the songs were patriotic songs and

20:00 consequently if you had someone in the services you were pretty proud. Those who couldn't go, I was too young but there were a lot of people in reserved occupations, there were a lot of people did what they could not to go, and whether you were innocent or otherwise you were pretty heavily frowned upon by the populace

20:30 at large. There even was a practice, I believe, that if you were not in uniform you would get white feathers in the mail and things like that. As a young kid my family was very well represented so I was a very proud young fellow and very devastated when the brother was knocked over, but

21:00 the patriotism of the time demanded that they go and you felt proud of it and I suppose that is how I felt.

It didn't take to your idea of what war was?

No-one has any idea of that. All the newsreels, every time you went to the movies you got newsreels and all that and it portrayed the fellows

21:30 in the good times and showed them as happy-go-lucky and war was a matter of fact. You never ever saw, you only saw artillery and aircraft and ships and that and you never saw any of the blood and guts. You might see pan shots of the battlefield after we had won a battle, but obviously they wouldn't show you anything

22:00 when we lost. I remember seeing photographs of the tanks because the desert warfare was great for tanks, and I would see the tanks going and I would see photographs of tanks burning and all that, but you never saw bodies or anything of that nature. You had no idea of what was going on or anything like that. So they painted the best

22:30 picture of war at that time.

How did your parents console you?

Console you? I don't think there was anything great in consolation per se. I think when the news hit the family everyone was devastated and everyone just felt their grief in their own way. I know

23:00 my Mum cuddled us and things like that, but she had her own grief to deal with and I think you sort of got on with it as best you could and that was that.

Did she have a badge with the stars?

Yes, she got a little badge. I don't know where that is. My wife has that put away somewhere,

23:30 a little badge and a link underneath it with a bar on it. On that bar there were stars for the number of boys lost. Some had two or three, Mum had one star on hers.

What was school like for you during that time?

I feel that I had… Because I only did basically

24:00 primary school, but I feel I had an exemplary school. It was Carlingford School. Most of the teachers, not all, were retirees called back for the duration of the war. We had a couple who taught in the very early part of the

24:30 war and then went away, and we had two killed. Those older teachers were absolutely great and I see something now and I say, "I learnt that at school at Carlo." They gave us… It wasn't just the reading, writing and arithmetic. They gave us a very rounded

25:00 education indeed. And one in particular, he must have spent most of his early life down around the Murray River and in all my experience listening back to what he told, I never met such a liar in all my life. He told us one story once that this thing got on his line and

25:30 it was pulling him so he hooked it up to the dray and it was pulling the dray in, and eventually this truck came past so he hooked it up to the back of a truck and out come this fish. He would tell you with the straightest face ever. But he was a wonderful liar and a bush yarn teller and a great teacher and had all the little gimmicks in the world. I remember the multiplication of,

26:00 no, in division of fractions and one bloke couldn't get it, and he said, "You lay on the floor," and he picked him up by the ankles and he shook him and all the things out of the boy's pocket fell on the floor. And he said, "There you are. Invert and multiply." He used to do things like that all the time so I had I think an exemplary primary school. And primary school finished

26:30 at equivalent to Queensland Grade 6, and then you went into secondary school and I did first year then I left then. I would say I had a good school for that time.

Were there any bomb shelters or did you have an air raids or things like that?

No. We had… At the school we had to dig our own.

27:00 We never had any air raids but they used to have these practices and we would have all been killed in the first ten minutes or less because we faced a street which was sealed, one of the few in the district that was, and then there was the church ground and we had to go from the school, across the road, into the church ground, into the trenches we had dug, and you weren't allowed to run.

27:30 I can imagine that if a bomb had fallen or something like that. But we had all these drills that you had to do but we never had any air raids or anything like it. We had practices and we used to practise about once a month. The bell would go and you had to go outside and march in your order and get in, and when everyone was in and they said, "That went very well," and it took them about 40 minutes to get you into the trench.

28:00 But other than that, that was about it. All the classes in their turn had to dig the zigzag trench with steps down either end, and they had to be six feet deep. It took us weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks, all the kids digging. But everyone was in, boys and girls and all that kind of thing, we all dug trenches.

28:30 That was about it.

Was there other ways that the war came into your school life?

Not really, we were taught about the war. One of the things we did then which I feel we should do now, the teacher would bring the paper. In Sydney I am not sure whether it was the Telegraph or the Sydney Morning Herald, but

29:00 you used to get the paper and starting on that the teacher would hand the paper around and a person would stand up and read from the paper to the rest of the class and discuss that. And we would do that about ten minutes every morning so you got current affairs. And in those days 99% of journalism was the war. We used to get all that and then

29:30 there would be a war map and there may be two or more of the different fronts that were going at the time and you would see as opposed to yesterday whether there were any advances or retreats and something like that. The war was brought to you at least once a day every day to see how things were going.

When news of your brother came, did the school know about that?

30:00 No, well no. I was in class and the brother older than me came up and got me out of class, and when I went home, and I am not sure whether I had the next day off or not, but when I went back to school the school all knew about it, and the headmaster called me up and

30:30 had a bit of a yarn to me about it. I can't remember much about it but I remember he called me up to have a yarn and because so many families had that happen to them as well so we were by no means unique.

You continued on to do your first year of the secondary?

I did up until the September, October

31:00 and then I lost my Mum.

How did that happen?

Cancer. And then my Dad pulled me out of school and I went working with him. He had come out of the army by that time. He didn't stay in the army all that long after the brother got killed because my Mum started to get sick then.

31:30 I think she had two operations a couple of years apart before she died. And he stayed, he got out of the army and he was at home at least every night, and when she died I started working with him. He had a truck and I was what they used to term the jockey on the truck, and we used to travel

32:00 up around Wyong from Sydney and return three times a week and that is how I started my working life.

What did you do as a jockey?

You had the driver and the jockey. The jockey guides them when they are backing and make sure the load is secure and general dogsbody, come gopher ['go for' this, 'go for' that] for the driver, and you do that

32:30 so that they concentrate on driving and things of that nature. I did that for about twelve or eighteen months.

Then what did you do?

In that time he and I were baching [living as bachelors] and living fairly rough, and one of my sisters got married, my youngest sister got married. And

33:00 in the time I was with my Dad I picked up this growth thing on the back of my neck and he used to come the old idea of, “We will give her a squeeze and she will be all right.” He pulled me out of the rafters three or four times and say, “There is nothing coming out. We will leave it till tomorrow.” So I would dread tomorrow. And my sister was getting married and I went to the wedding and I was like this. My sister older than her

33:30 said, “You are not going back. You are going to stay with me,” and took me to a doctor and it turned out it was an infectious thing of some sort and it had to be lanced and all that type of thing. So I then stayed with my sister and my father sold the truck then and he went up in the bush up to Tamworth, outside Tamworth at a place called Walcha. Whilst I lived with my sister I

34:00 worked in the rose nurseries around Carlingford and I was just getting the hang of it and being taught the more intricate things, budding and grafting and all that type of thing, and my Dad wrote down from Tamworth and wanted me up there with him. I was still only just rising fifteen and so there was nothing… So I had to go up there. The next thing I went with him and some other

34:30 fellows and we went down around between Goulburn and Canberra and we were fencing on the soldiers’ settlement blocks down there out there on a great windswept plain, and we spent nearly six months down there. And then we went to where we used to cart from with the truck at a place called Mandalong, which is only a district, or was then, only a district. And

35:00 that is out from Morisset between Morisset and Wyong, and I was cutting timber there mainly for the mines. At that stage 100% of the mining was underground mining and of course they used to shore it all up with pit blocks and slabs and that was our main cutting, but if you came

35:30 across a log which was worth cutting, well you knocked him over as well, so I did that on and off.

Did you have much contact with the soldiers?

The soldiers?

The returned ones?

Yes, a few. As a matter of fact I got some message from one of the old fellows the other day. He was the forest ranger and he was an ex commando and he used to

36:00 mark trees that were to be left. He was astute enough to come back and make sure they were still there after we had been through and if there were any missing he used to read the riot act. But he was very fair with us, I will say that, he was more than fair. He used to look after us. And there were two other chaps who had come back from the 8th Division but they didn’t cut timber. They

36:30 bought an old rundown, well, abandoned citrus orchard and they between them were making that into an up and modernised this orchard, which they did by hand, and they used to work from daylight until dark. A few of the other timber cutters were ex servicemen. I didn’t know them before they went away but I knew them when they came back. Let’s face it,

37:00 the preponderance of men were returned servicemen so you had contact with returned servicemen pretty well much wherever you went.

Were the settlement blocks big enough?

To my mind, no. I haven’t been back but I remember our contact fellow, he had I think 720 acres

37:30 and I think the biggest was slightly over 1300 acres, and he had a lot of sheet rock, half an acre of just bare rock. And when you look at in I believe the record during the Korean War was a pound a pound, which is $2 a pound, but a pound was worth a lot of money then.

38:00 Even at three sheep to the acre this bloke would have twenty-one hundred sheep or thereabouts, and if he got good fleeces and all that and when it all weighed out and he had his yearly, I don’t think they would have done very well. I could be wrong because I have never done a detailed study of it but I don’t think they were big enough at all from seven hundred to thirteen hundred-odd acres.

38:30 It doesn’t leave much room. But you would have to go and see if they were still there and who’s on them and what they have done with it, but I don’t think they would.

So the work that you did in the timber industry, that was before the settlement, is that right?

No, after it.

Oh, after the settlement blocks. How did that transition happen

39:00 **from working in the settlement blocks to…?**

That is when I went up to my Dad in Tamworth and we went down. I left the rose nurseries and went up

to Tamworth or Walcha and I went down to the soldier settlement blocks and then I went into the timber. I was in the timber and I was working for these people that we had known in Carlingford, and then one day there was…

39:30 Because everything was with crosscut saws and axes in those days and we used to do sleepers with a broad axe and all that, and I don't know who, but somebody had barked this log which was on the side of the hill and they started cutting it with a crosscut saw and they went very well until they got through it and it broke off

40:00 and it skidded on the bark. If you know anything about timber, when you take that bark off it is like glass, it is so slippery. And it chased him as it were, and he went to hurdle a log and he got over except one leg and it crushed quite an amount of his leg against the log he was trying to get over, and then there was a trauma of the weight.

40:30 We were thirty-odd miles from Newcastle and the only ambulance was at Newcastle, so by the time you rang, got to the post office, which we were four or five miles in the bush and the only to get in there the only way we had was horse or walk, and one bloke started to ride out on a horse and he rode into this slippery creek bed and the horse fell and broke his foot, and then they got the ambulance.

41:00 And anyway, we were getting them out in the dark. That meant all the jobs went. And so one of the fellows who was working said, "Come down to Victoria with me," so I went with him and we went to Victoria.

Tape 2

00:33 **Was there any other difficult kind of elements in the timber industry at that time?**

Oh well in the timber industry it is all that dangerous. It is not all that long ago I read there was a chap killed down at Casino. When you fall a tree it normally brushes lightly or heavily against other trees and

01:00 branches break and some remain hung up there but most fall to the ground. Those hanging up there are called widow makers, and that is what happened to this bloke down around Casino. He felled a tree or something so I gather and he walked in and one of these let go and fell on him and killed him. And that is always on – you have got to look up and live because otherwise

01:30 it is dangerous, depending on how thick the canopy is where you are falling. You can always not hit as you intend and therefore glance off and it is in your leg. Some fellows, you know, in the days I was cutting, used to use an adze for squaring, not so much squaring, for mortising posts

02:00 and things of that nature, and they have quite a curved blade. Again, you can hit not square and it is in your leg. When you fall a tree you cut it so the way you get it, it is easiest to get it out because it is in your mind, "How do I get it out once it is on the ground?" We used bullocks in those days and you can fall it and just as it goes a gust of wind or

02:30 anything can come and it can kick back. And we had one instance there we always run mutual safety on one another and this fellow didn't come home so we were called and got on our horses and went looking and went to his, actually it was his mother, and said, "Where is he cutting?" She said, "I am not sure," but she thought he was up this particular district

03:00 of the area. So we went looking and couldn't find him. He had gone up there, apparently, and decided he would cut another place not too far away. Anyway the upshot of it was it took us two and a half days to find him and what I have just described had happened to him, a tree had kicked back and hit him against another tree and he was all crushed here. When he was found the ants had got to him and

03:30 God knows what, and he was still alive. His horse was tethered and couldn't get away so it was almost collapsing through no water and things like that, and so that was a fairly horrific thing because he did a few things wrong, because you always let someone know where you are and you sort of… It is an unwritten rule that, if you can, that you are within axe sound of

04:00 someone else. In this day of chainsaw I suppose it is the same where you've engine noise or something like that, so that if anything happens and you are conscious you can at least yell and get some assistance that way. You don't cut in the wet because it is too slippery over timber and on strip bark and all that. There are a few safety factors to be taken into consideration wherever you are cutting. It is a pretty dangerous

04:30 occupation, but people have done it for years and years and years. It is just that you have got to look at the safety factors and keep them in the back of your mind all the time.

From there you decided to go to Victoria?

Yes, this chap offered to take me down there and I hadn't seen Victoria when I was knocking around so we just appeared on his Mum's doorstep. He said, "I have brought a mate home." So

05:00 I finished up sleeping on a bed in the hall, and his mother was very good to me. And we went and we got a job with, it was then known as Moulder Products, which is Nylex plastic, and he was in the mill and they have these big mills that they put these granules on and it comes into strips and then they do things with it. And I was what they called a

05:30 process tester. I suppose in the modern day would be quality control. And you have got to measure thickness of insulation and any wall, like a hose wall, if it was supposed to be so thick you had a tolerance of 1 or 2 mm or that, I had to measure that and do that and actually test the quality of what it says. I did that.

06:00 And I did that until my brother older than me got married and I returned to Mandalong. I went to the wedding, came home, threw in my job, came home, went back to Mandalong and cut timber again until I was eighteen and I joined the army. I had a bit over twelve months, nearly fifteen months in Melbourne.

06:30 **Were you waiting to turn eighteen?**

Yes.

What were your reasons?

I was just, I could think of no other reason that ever since I could remember I wanted to be a soldier or a swing drummer in a band. Don't ask me why but that is what I wanted to be.

That is quite opposite, they are opposite really.

That is what I wanted to be.

07:00 I never really had the money to buy drums or anything like that so I joined the army. My eldest sister was then living at Bondi Junction, as I said, and I went and stayed with her for a couple of days and come the day of my birthday I went down to Victoria Barracks and I went in and I said, "I want to join the army." They said, "Have you got a birth certificate?"

07:30 I said, "Yes," and he said, "You couldn't have joined up yesterday, could you?" And I said, "No." So he took all my particulars and sent me home, because I thought I would go straight in and do it all, and it was a fortnight later, on 5th October, I was sworn in.

What was your dad's reaction?

He was in Queensland at the time

08:00 and my sister rang him and said I wanted to join the army, and he said he wouldn't sign the papers. She said, "If you don't, I will." And he said, "Well damn you, you sign them." So she signed them and she was my next of kin until I got right through and got married.

Why wouldn't he sign them?

I think the fear of the elder brother, and Korea had just started. It started in June or July

08:30 and that reinforced me. I wanted to go. I think the fear that he would lose me. I don't know. We never discussed it because I was in the army I suppose almost twelve months when he died. I got to Brisbane in time for him to pass away, but I never had a chance to discuss

09:00 it with him at all. That is the supposition I put on it. So my sister was my next of kin for a good many years.

What did you know of what was happening over in Korea?

Only the newspaper reports that it was on, and like all stupid young boys I wanted to go.

09:30 No-one knew, you got a few reports, nothing like the Second World War, and it subsequently became known as the forgotten war. I just knew I wanted to go and that was it. Once I joined the army, of course, there were various fellows coming back in dribs and drabs. And of course at that stage we only had

10:00 one battalion and I think a destroyer, that was off the coast, and the air force squadron that was supporting the troops was based in Japan. It used to fly across each day until they got up north and then it moved to Korea proper, so you got a bit in the papers and that, and once I joined the army it was first and foremost.

10:30 A few fellows started coming back because our mob went in September. I think they had their first wounded in September and it was from then on there was a few coming back, and normally they would come back and be held at Marrickville or at Royal Park, which is Melbourne, until they were posted out to another job or discharged, that's about all. You knew a little bit, but not much.

11:00 **You hadn't joined up under the K Force?**

Wasn't able. K Force was for anyone who had service prior to Korea and they hoped for active service,

but a lot of them had been in BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force], that is the occupation force, and they joined it. They were eligible to join K Force. I wasn't until I think possibly

11:30 '52 where they brought in a category where you really joined up for twelve months operational service and twelve months after, but I think that came about the middle of '52, somewhere around that. When I joined up you could only join the regular army or be entitled to join K Force, so I joined the regular army.

Can you tell us about that initial rookie

12:00 **training?**

That was conducted at Ingleburn and I think recruit training is much like school days – it is the best part. You don't think so at the time, just like school, but everything is new. And when you get in the army they all have,

12:30 someone will tell everybody at some time you have got a field marshal's baton in our back and all you have to do is work hard and you can have that baton. Like a fool you believe them. But it is something you have never experienced. It is totally different to anything in civilian life. It doesn't take long and you start

13:00 forming your mates and they come from every walk of life, well they did then. Right a cross-section of all they are in, and we had both coloured and white and there was a sergeant major who was ex Second World War and he was Chinese and he had been right through the war.

13:30 We had yellow, black and white that I knew there. And so you are learning to do that you just can't saunter here, there and everywhere. You have got to go from point A to point B in a formed body of men and things like that. Everything is for the team. In my day, when we moved in we used to live twenty men to a hut, or twenty of us fellows –

14:00 we weren't men but trying like hell to be, though. This was in 1950 and we had nothing. They gave us nothing and we expected nothing. But we got good instruction and our instructors were in the main Second World War. We had a few interim army as they call them at the time, but in the main they were Second World War

14:30 and they knew what they were talking about. And they treated you harshly but fairly. If you fouled up you paid the price, if you did your job you were rewarded, and it was a wonderful experience. Our meals were dreadful but we got fat so they must have been all right. We put on weight and we grew. And

15:00 I didn't attend it, but the bloke who is charge of the kitchen is called the warrant officer caterer, and the fellow we had was so big he couldn't wear a web belt. It is a webbing belt about that wide with brass buckles and it has a very big, normally a very big adjustment on it, but he couldn't wear one. And he had to wear a special leather belt. And his watch was as big as an alarm clock, and a big deep voice.

15:30 I am told that when he died the eight men couldn't carry him and they had him on a front-end loader, but whether that is true or not I don't know. One incidence, you had a number of platoons and each platoon took it in turns of being the duty platoon because in recruits and in infantry, unlike most other places, you don't have, or we didn't have,

16:00 mess stewards and things like that, so you had to peel the spuds for the cooks and wash the dixies for the cooks. We had the old black metal fuel wooden stoves and all that and all the bench tops weren't stainless steel. They were galvanised iron nailed down and that all had to be cleaned. Anyway on the duty platoon I had it in my pay book that I was a

16:30 timber cutter so I wore the job of cutting the firewood. I didn't know anything other than it was a job to be done, so get in and do it. So I did that and he came out and I had a pile of wood like that. He said, "Snowy, that is a wonderful job. Come on and I will give you a reward." So he took me into the kitchen and he cut an orange in half. He give me a half an orange. They reckoned I was a

17:00 crawler because I got a present off the caterer, which was half an orange, for about four hours' work. We enjoyed it, we enjoyed recruits, and that lasted until we joined up and we started. We had to do education originally, yeah, I forgot that. We had to have the equivalent I think of sixth class education before you could go on, and the education course

17:30 used to give you a week in each class one to six. If you were good enough to do sixth class in week two, well you passed onto training, but if you weren't you had to stay on until you could pass the sixth class exam. And we had blokes there who could not read nor write. That took up one or two or three weeks depending upon who you were, possibly

18:00 six weeks. And then you did your recruit training and at the completion of that you were allocated to a corps, whether you were signals, artillery, infantry or whatever you were. That was it. I think I did a week I think. You had to do the week and go through all the classes in a day. I think I did it in a bit over a week and then one day on PT [Physical Training]

18:30 we were doing what they call the section assault course as PT, and that is an assault course you do in a group, and one of the walls you had to get over was about ten or twelve feet high. And when you do it

with battle gear on they used to stand there and one would hold the butt, one would hold the muzzle and you would stand on that and they would throw you up and you would grab the top and roll over and fall down the other side.

19:00 I wasn't very big and we are doing PT and these blokes had a big stick, and I grabbed that and they threw and I am going up and the wall stopped and I kept going, and I came down on my back across the wall and then just tumbled off the wrong side so no-one could catch me. I landed on my date [backside]. I was all right and I completed the rest of the course. And it was a Wednesday morning because the Wednesday,

19:30 that afternoon… Swimming used to be conducted in the Georges River at Casula and I opted to go swimming, and I had lunch and got in the bus, and when we got to Casula I couldn't get out the bus. I was a stiff as a board. So the bus took me back and they put me in hospital and I did a fortnight in hospital. They did x-rays and all that and I had bruised all my hip and all that and it had swelled, and at one stage of the game I

20:00 had a backside that Diana Dors would have been proud of down one side. But it gradually came down and I continued my training and I think finished, I was allocated the first week of January '51. That was recruit training and you learn all the very basics, how to march, how to stand and everything. You learn the basics

20:30 way of soldiering, just the very basic. And you get to fire the rifle, in those days it was the Bren gun and the Owen gun, and throw grenades. I remember there we went down to Greenhills was the grenade range. No it wasn't, it was at Ingleburn, that's right, we went to Ingleburn. And they warn you all the time that you pick up

21:00 nothing off the range because it could be live and anything, and you don't know how long it has been there generally. And explosives deteriorate over time and become very unstable and you have only got to touch in some instances and it is sufficient to set it off. This bloke was giving us the big prattle all about grenades and all that and he said to this fellow, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I am trying to get this out." And he had a grenade and he was trying to get the igniter set out of the bottom

21:30 and he wondered why he was on his own in nothing flat – everybody was peeping around the… So he spent a couple of days chasing the bugle.

Tell us about chasing the bugle?

They didn't want to, in those days they used to do confined to barracks, or CB, for a crime, but with us they didn't want to unless it was an absolute crime. Gor misdemeanours you used to saddle up with those confined to barracks

22:00 and if you were on that when you knocked off at, say, I think we knocked off at 4, at 4.30 you had to appear on parade dressed in basic webbing and you did half an hour's drill at double time. Everything was in double time. At 5 o'clock you went for tea and then you

22:30 helped in the kitchen. At 6 o'clock you appeared at a designated place in the dress of the day and the orderly sergeant would be there and he would check your name off and he would say, "Right, at half past six you will be at a certain place dressed for leave." So back to the hut and get dressed for leave, and at the appointed time the

23:00 bugle would blow and you had to be there and dressed for that. You would be inspected and then he would say, "At half past, back here dressed for PT." So this went on until 10 o'clock at night. You had your mates in the hut and you would fly in and say, "Guard," so everyone would make sure your brass was clean and all that and they would dress you and away you would go. You would come back

23:30 and dress for field service marching order and all that and Blanco and everything was squared away, different dress every time in a different place. And he, the lucky devil, he had a pushbike but you had to do it on foot and get back and get dressed and chase him, and that is what they call chasing the bugle.

Did you have to do that?

Yes.

A lot of times?

No more than most others, everybody got it. They used to get you for everything.

24:00 You weren't going to get away because if you got through you weren't part of the mob, so you had to be part of the mob so everybody did it and everybody helped. It was dreadful while you were doing it but it moulded you into a team, and everyone helped and that was it. It taught you respect for rank and it taught you respect for rules and all that type of thing. They took it out in the last,

24:30 since I have got out of the army even before, about that time, I think the late '70s they took it out so they don't do it any more, apparently.

What about maintaining your uniform and the brass bits and things like that?

Again in recruit training we had a row of barracks there and a row of barracks there, little parade grounds, and then in the centre

25:00 were the ablutions and the showers and toilets, and the laundry was what they call the Sawyer stove. It was a cast iron thing and in the bottom was a fire grate with air underneath and in the top was the old copper type copper with a chimney would take its height up to about five or six feet. You would stoke her up and boil your washing

25:30 and wash it wherever you like, and then you took it into the ablutions, which was a great long trough made from galvanised iron with cold water and that is where you did your hand washing and things of that nature. And then there were clothes lines, you did that there. We were dressed in the old khaki drill and service dress. You used to get two sets of service

26:00 dress and an overcoat, three sets of khaki drill and I think we got two sets of protective dress. The khaki, the starch in those days was White Star Starch. You used to get it in rather big granules, quite big, and you mixed that up with so much water and it became like milk. Then

26:30 you put hot water in it and it would become real gluey stuff, it would become like that paper paste, you know that Clag or something? And you sort of thinned that down by trial and error and you would dunk your clothes in that and then hung them up dripping to dry, and of course they were very, very stiff. When you finished, when they were dry you then dampened

27:00 them and rolled them up and from that you ironed them with a hot iron and they were like boards. If you were getting dressed for guard you would stand on the end of your bed with a couple of mates and jump into these so that you wouldn't crease them, and they would put your boots on and do things like that because once you bent, that was it – you got this cross-crease business.

27:30 And your shirt was the same, your shirt as stiff as anything. I think they called it raw starch but that was the only way we had of starching. I had been in the army a while when this spray starch came out and that was a godsend because this other way was dreadful. We used to be issued with wartime red boots

28:00 which we had to blacken with Raven oil, and if you included the hat and the eyelets in the boots I think we had something like eighty-four pieces of brass to be polished. And we used to get this cake of stuff and you used to get it with water and you used to Blanco over the webbing and it would give it a pale green

28:30 effect rather than the dirty sandy colour. The brass had to be polished back and front every night or every day so you used to do it at night ready for the morning. If you were on guard you had to have your clothes starched, and of course we used to spit polish our boots. They used to look like glass, like patent leather with the polishing.

29:00 In the hut you had three pegs on the wall and one was for your overcoat, one was your SDs [Service Dress] and one was for a set of KDs [Khaki Drill] and it had… Originally, for about the first month I think I was in we had a palliasse, which is like a big chaff bag, and you fill that with straw and that is your bed, and three blankets and a pillow and

29:30 at the foot of that was a soldier's box. I suppose that would be about two or three feet long by two feet wide by about eighteen inches deep, and everything else was in there folded up. Your webbing when you weren't wearing it was laid out on your bed, your rifle was in the armoury and your rifle bolt was also in there. You had no arms in the hut

30:00 except at night for cleaning, and then it all had to go back in at night. Your boots used to have to be laid out. You had two pair of boots because you had one on, and it used to have to be boots, shoes and gym shoes and it was laid out. You had like a little locker which used to have a shelf in it and on the top used to be your dixies because you didn't have plates; your knife, fork and mug and

30:30 your razor and toothbrush and soap in a container underneath, and that was your home. You had no security of any kind, no locks, no nothing. And stretched from one end of your hut to the other was a wire and on that used to be the towel that you were using. That was your home, that little bit, with twenty or so others.

31:00 You maintained that by use of, you never used to use much Brasso because it was too messy. We used to get a thing like cotton wool called Duraglint and it was impregnated with the Brasso type stuff and you used to polish with that. The Blanco used to be done and we used to get paper or whatever you could which was something you always had.

31:30 You never got boards or something like that because you had nowhere to store them out of the way except under your palliasse, and you weren't supposed to do it and if you were found you were in trouble. Your paper would go into the rubbish and so with the laundry and you had an ironing room attached to the ablutions where the ironing boards were up on the wall and then you let them down and then fold it back. You used to get an iron out of the Q [Quartermaster's] store

32:00 and that is how you maintained all your gear.

That is great detail. What did you used to do for pastimes? Like once you finished for the day were you free to do what you wanted after you'd done all your chores?

The thing is, by the time you Blanco, polish the brass and there is not a lot of time left and you were normally pretty whacked out.

32:30 We had camp movies and the canteen and that is all there was. If we went from where we were up into what was known as the battalion lines, which would be half a mile, bit over, to walk, there was the Salvation Army Everyman's hut, and providing you sang hymns and listened

33:00 to the religious spiel you got a cup of tea, coffee or cocoa and a couple of biscuits, but that is all there was. There was nothing else other than the canteen. The canteen was dry and wet, and the dry sold pretty much everything, your tobacco, cigarettes, cleaning gear, writing gear, pretty much everything. It was like a mini grocery store. And the wet canteen in those days

33:30 used to consist of a civilian contractor selling hot dogs and a keg on a box, and you used to get the half pint enamel mug filled for sixpence out of the keg. There was no beer, none of this frozen beer, it all came out of the keg which were kept in the cold room when they weren't being used.

34:00 And when I got there in the October they were renovating this old place and the walls were solid to about waist high and above that was, you know the Cooper louvres, as they call them? Just all those louvres. But they didn't have any glass in them and it was an earthenware floor. I remember when we first got there it was as cold as anything and there they all were standing around in their overcoats drinking

34:30 beer out of an enamel mug and that is all there was to do. If your company had a night that was on, because different companies had a night to go to the pictures. You couldn't go to the pictures every night that you wanted to, it had to be your night, and if it was your night you could go to the movies and that is all there was to do.

You mentioned earlier the chef called you Snowy, was that your nickname?

Originally, yes.

35:00 He called me Snowy, that was the old one. A lot of blokes used to call me Snowy or Curly, among other things.

Did you get much leave?

No, in the recruit company we used to get Wednesday night. You would knock off and you had to be in by midnight, and you worked Saturday morning and you got leave from 12 o'clock

35:30 Saturday until midnight Sunday and that is all you got. You had to have a leave parade prior to going on and you weren't allowed to have any civilian clothes. You had to leave and enter the camp in uniform. No private vehicles, or very few of us could afford a car, but there were no private vehicles in camp at all. And we used to travel by either taxi from Ingleburn to Liverpool or

36:00 by bus and they were the only two modes of conveyance unless someone you knew gave you a lift home and then they were not allowed to leave the main road. They were not allowed to enter the camp or anything like that.

It would have been too far to go back to Sydney on leave, so what did you do?

Sydney was an hour to Liverpool, and the buses used to meet most of the trains and it was twenty minutes by bus.

36:30 **(UNCLEAR).**

I only went to Puckapunyal in later years on different armed cooperation exercises. I was never stationed at Puckapunyal, that was armoured corps.

Did you go back and visit your sister?

Which one? In Bondi Junction? We remained in close contact and she only passed away a couple of years ago. And

37:00 she lived here in Toowoomba with us so she and I remained in close contact all our lives. She had a handicapped daughter, whom I am the guardian of now. Oh yes, we were very close all the time. I have a brother older than me and he lives in Taree and we are still very close, and that's him over there with me.

37:30 And the sister I lived with in Parramatta, she is in a nursing home in Kingaroy and I visit her and I take my niece up to visit her once a month, so we maintained contact all our life.

At the end of recruitment training you were allocated into which corps?

Signals, signals. That was the first battle that I had with army and one of the many losses I had

38:00 with the army. I don't think I ever won one with them. I wanted to go to Korea and you go into the room and there is this officer from Central Army Records among others, and I don't know why he wasted his time, he said, "Where do you want to go?" And I said, "I want to go to infantry." And he said, "Oh no, you are going to signals." And why he asked me, I don't know. I said, "I don't want to go to signals. I want to go to infantry." Anyway

38:30 I said I didn't want to and he said I was and I went and I was posted to Balcombe.

You went infantry?

No, signals. You don't win. And I was posted to signals and the School of Signals. All these corps have a school where they teach their individual art, and I went to the School of Signals, which was then at

39:00 Balcombe, which is now is known as Mount Martha, on the Mornington Peninsula, south of Melbourne. I think, I forget how many but there was quite a few of us shanghaied into signals. Some wanted to go and there was a few of us that didn't, but anyway that is where we wound up.

Did it take you long to accept that?

I never accepted it. I fought them all the time

39:30 and that was why I was so late getting to Korea as they wouldn't let me go. I became a rebel. In those days you went by train everywhere and if you were below the rank of warrant officer you travelled second class, and there were eight seats and they used to

40:00 put eight of you in it and so there was no room to move or anything. We travelled to Albury and then they used to change trains there because you couldn't go straight through. You had to change from NSW [New South Wales] to Victorian rail there and wait while they changed all the baggage and all that. And then we went to Balcombe and when we got there

40:30 there was this great, I suppose it was almost an acre of loose stony gravel and all that, and it was a big turn around area. And at the bottom of it was the transport compound. And the bus pulled up and we got all our gear out and all that, and we were wondering, "Where do we go?" because we couldn't see a signpost or anything, and it was our introduction. And a voice came out, "Ah," and, "Who is that?" And we couldn't work it out. And this fellow came out from

41:00 behind the hedge, this big hedge they had there, and he was waiving a pace stick at us and he came over to us at a rapid rate and snapped to this great dramatic halt and he said to one of the fellows, "Who are you?" And he said, "Private so and so." "I didn't ask what you were. Who are you?" He said, "My name is so and so." And he said, "Do you know who I am?" and he poked at him with this stick. What have we got here?

41:30 Anyway this fellow said, "No sir." "You don't know who I am?" He said, "No sir." He said, "I am Sergeant Major Eastlake and I am a bastard. What am I?" "You are a bastard." And he said, "That is right. That is right." And that was our introduction to signals.

Tape 3

00:33 When we got off the bus and this bloke yelled out, "Aye, aye," and we looked around and he came around from behind this big high hedge, which later turned out to be to shield the officers' mess, and he came over and he said to this bloke, "Who are you? Who are you?" And he poked him and this digger said,

01:00 "I am Private so and so." And he said, "I didn't ask what you were. Who are you?" He says, "I am so and so." And he says "Oh yes. Do you know who I am?" He said, "No." He said, "I am Sergeant Major Eastlake and I am a bastard." It turned out he was the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of the school and he was known to all and sundry as Jimmy the One, and he was a very colourful character but underneath it all not a bad bloke.

01:30 All RSMs have got to be actors, that it is first and foremost the RSM is an actor and he is a show pony, and albeit I say it to myself, he knows his work because he has a lot of experience behind him.

Can you explain for us the story behind Jimmy the One?

Yeah the corps badge of the Corps of Signals, it is Mercury winged feet

02:00 standing on the earth and the motto is serta seta, which in Latin means 'swift and sure'. But according to the soldiers of the corps it means 'quicker by post' and Jimmy the One, Mercury is known Jimmy and he is standing on the earth, and they reckon that Jimmy has only got one ball so therefore he is known as Jimmy the One.

02:30 **What was the first thing that they did to you at signals?**

We got there they were, like I suppose all corps of the army at the time, they were totally unprepared for us and they didn't have accommodation in the usual sense. We still had the twenty man huts but by this time we had beds and they were all

03:00 hospital beds. And we had a, later knew them to be a mattress latex rubber sprayed which was like coir and it was sprayed with latex and that wasn't a bad mattress, and we had sheets, so we had gone up market. And these were all laid out in the training wing

03:30 as it was known, but as we hadn't started there was no accommodation. So we were in some old huts that were used for storage and we had to get in and pack what was stored there up more on top of each other to create room for us to live in these store huts. We stayed there until accommodation, I am not sure how many courses marched out but they marched out and we took their place in the training wing. We

04:00 hadn't been assessed by them or anything and we didn't know who was doing what course or anything like that so we were kept on general duties. There was a great planting program going on and they used to bring in these bits of grass that had been dug up with a rotary hoe or something and dump it in heaps and we had to rake it out and water it in, plant bushes, paint stones, do anything to keep us occupied while we were waiting for training.

04:30 **Did you feel like you treated any differently there to the way you were treated at basic training?**

We were nowhere near as regimented. Jimmy used to run around and surprise us and yell at us and all this type of thing. The NCOs were mainly technical people and they weren't much interested in the regimental thing except when necessary. But in the main there was a parade, roll call and all that and do what work

05:00 and you were left alone to do your work and that. Of course when you get into the classroom it was a pure classroom atmosphere, but there was not half the regimentation there was in recruit training, no. It was just the waiting game until we got to courses. And of course I still wanted to go to Korea and every week without fail I used to put in an application for transfer and every week without fail it used to get knocked back.

05:30 **Was it your thought at the time that they weren't sending any signals blokes to Korea?**

They weren't really because they would send individuals as opposed to formations because the signals, we only had the one army battalion, and the communications and all that was handled by British, Canadian and American and

06:00 it wasn't handled by Australians at all. But they would integrate the unit, the signals units, by sending one or two individuals into it so the Corp of Sigs [Signals] as such weren't really getting a look in. Neither was any other corps other than infantry, that is in the early stages and I wanted to get back to infantry to go to Korea. I used to put in for transfer after transfer after transfer

06:30 and made a name for myself there.

How were you informed of the decision?

You had to go, we had a GD sergeant, a general duty sergeant, and you would give him that and he would take it down and go through the mill and he would come back and he'd say, "Your transfer has got back knocked back," and I would say, "That is all right. Here is another one."

07:00 That would go on like that and he was a pretty good bloke. A lot of these fellows sympathised with you. They knew you weren't interested in what they were going to teach you and so they accepted it and that was it.

Did they start teaching you stuff like signals?

I can't remember just what, we had to do assessments and the only

07:30 one I remember they took us into a room and they had a table and they had those old style locks dissembled, oh a couple I remember, and you had to assemble a lock, which wasn't hard to do. And another one, they took you in and they had a lot of objects on a table and you were given so long to look at it and then you had to go into another room

08:00 and write down what was in it. Anyway after all these assessments they said that they were going to make me what was called a line mechanic. A line mechanic is a trade that installs and maintains equipment that is used to send more than one speech over a pair of wires. They call

08:30 it carrier equipment and that and it is fairly technical stuff. It is above a radio mechanic, a straight radio technician, and they do all this switching arrangements and all that and they do that. And they said, "You are going to be a line mechanic," and I said, "No, I am not." And so I started training on that and we started off learning basic electricity,

09:00 which is DC [Direct Current] electricity, and we learnt first and foremost was Holmes Law. And again there is rude connotations made out of a lot of things, which I can't go into here, and then you learn

about electrical components and when,

09:30 in alternating current electricity is portrayed in a wiggly line like that and it is called sinecoidal curve or something, I forget the name of it. Anyway they likened this to a little thing to a little thing they used to call Ooey Gooey the Worm, and it shows this cycle of electricity which is Ooey Gooey

10:00 the Worm from the time you switched on. And you go into this piece of equipment and he battered about and gets put back together again and all this. I used to sit in the classroom and I used to draw the most ornate beautiful Ooey Gooey the Worm and the instructors used to go mad and tell me I was wasting my time and all that, and I said, "Well I put in for the transfer. Give me my transfer." I used to get defaulters' parade for mucking up in class.

What was defaulters' parade

10:30 **at sigs compared to bugle chasing?**

There was a bloke there, his name was Howe and he used to do defaulters' CB with me, and there was a couple of others that used to do it so there was always around about five or six of us, and Jimmy Eastlake used to sit outside the Corporal's Club because then the corporals never had a mess.

11:00 And we would, there was this bit of a hill and we would run up the hill and we would run back down the hill and we would run up the hill and we'd run back down again and Jimmy would have a couple of slurps of beer brought from the corporals' mess and he would say, "Halt," and he would say, "Have you had enough?" And this bloke Howe used to say, "Get stuffed." "Double march," up the hill, down the hill, up the hill, down the hill and he would say, "Have you had enough?" And he would say, "Get stuffed." Up and down, and this used to go on every night

11:30 down there. And we used to say to him, "Cut it out, for God's sake. We have had enough." He said, "No, you can do it. Come on." And away we used to go up and down the hill with this, and that was our defaulters' there with old Jimmy. And then Jimmy's wife would have tea on so he would have to go home so that would be fatigue for the night, PT for the night, and we would be back again tomorrow night. We used to get that for mucking up in class.

What was your mindset towards training

12:00 **other than the fact that you didn't want to be there?**

I just didn't want to be there. I wasn't interested in it. The other thing I remember is there is an apparatus called a Wheatstone bridge and any wire that carries electricity is called a conductor and I can't remember it all. It was something to do with this conductor chasing this woman over a

12:30 Wheatstone bridge and I used to portray this picture and all that, and when we would have an exam I would give my version of this and they used to go mad at me. And various officers interviewed me and all this and I said, "I don't want to be here. I am not interested. I want to be in infantry." This went on for a while and they took me off the line mechanics course and I went back to doing

13:00 GDing [General Duties] as they call it. Old Jimmy Eastlake came in this day to me and I was scrubbing out a toilet and he said to me words to the effect and he said, "What are you doing?" And I thought it was rather obvious what I was doing so I said to him, "Sir I am stocktaking and I am one turd short," and well that was the end of it. He

13:30 made me stand to attention outside the orderly room and I had to go into the adjutant, said, "Right-oh Webster, we have had enough of you." He said, "If you don't do a course here and apply yourself I will make sure you stay here for the whole of your six years cleaning toilets." I then sort of said, "Well, right-oh," and he said, "There is a teletype operators course starting.

14:00 You can do that." So I said, "Fair enough." So that was the old teletypes and we had to do that. We got taught a little bit of theory, which I basically already knew from the basic electricity, and you just typed and you had to do something like fourteen or so many messages

14:30 each consisting of so many strikes in a quarter of an hour, and that was your speed test to pass to become a teletype operator. The thing went and I think I got, we scraped it and I was posted then from Balcombe up to AHQ [Army Headquarters] Sig Regiment, which is in Albert Park, which has all been reconfigured now. We used to look across

15:00 the lake. We were on the St Kilda end of the lake almost. And the air force had it and was there, and army headquarters, part of army headquarters was there. And across the lake between the lake and St Kilda Road was this big old building called Grosvenor, and that was where the workplace was, that was where all the Morse terminals and all that were there. I marched in and obviously

15:30 my record was with me. And we had a CO [Commanding Officer]; he was really a dear old gentleman. Had quite a good wartime record but the trouble was he had sleeping sickness or whatever it was he picked up, and he was known affectionately by all and sundry as Daddy.

16:00 You marched into Daddy and he would say, snore, and they'd wake him up. And he didn't last all that

long in my time before they discharged him because of this illness he had, but he was a great old bloke. He called me in and in between snores and snuffles I told him my problem and all that and he said, “Do you want to be a teletype operator?” And I said, “No,” and he said, “All right.” And

16:30 he said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I want to go back to infantry.” And he said, “I can’t do that, laddie, not after all this.” So he said, “I will tell you what, you can be a GD here for a while and we will see what we will do with you.” I worked around there for a while still putting in my transfer every week, and I cut grass and I chopped wood and all that, and this day this officer came up to me and he said,

17:00 “Can you drive?” And I said, “Yes.” So they sent me and I did a driving test and I went into driving and then they taught me to ride a Harley Davidson motorcycle and this was beaut, number one lair on a motorbike, and there were five of us I think it was and we used to Don R [Despatch Rider] duties all over Melbourne.

17:30 **Can you explain to us what Don R duties are?**

That is just a bloke on a motorbike carrying messages and packages from one point to another and picking up and that is all it is. He is like the modern day postman in a way, and that is all you were. But we used to have the big rubber canvas suits with the big helmet with the blue stripes around it and the big gauntlets, a real lair at eighteen and nineteen

18:00 year old lair. And we had a wet patch and I think I wasn’t the first but I was the third or the fourth one to go down and I remember it well. If you are familiar with Melbourne, we used to go up to the TAA [Trans Australian Airlines] Building up at the top of Swanston Street and I done what I had to while I was there, and I came down Swanston Street

18:30 and I was going to turn right into Spencer Street, right at Flinders Street Station, lunchtime and all that. I dropped her around a cog and around I went and I hit the bloody tram line, and there were some good-looking sorts [women] there and I finished up right at their feet. The ego went down. I wasn’t all that hurt but the bike wasn’t much good. And I went back

19:00 and within a day or two the last bloke went down, yeah I was fourth, so they took us out of that and we went into jeeps and we drove jeeps around. And they did away with bikes as for everyday duty. We were driving jeeps and this corporal came along and said, “How do you feel like being in the Tattoo?” and I said, “All right, what do I do?” He said, “We are getting a bike team together,” so I said, “All right.” So

19:30 we went down to the other end, we went down to the city end of Albert Park Lake where there was a CMF [Citizens’ Military Force] unit there and there was this Pommy officer who had been in English signals and we were to do a show in the Tattoo, and I think there were a number of items. One we put twenty-odd blokes or something, I can’t remember, on a bike and we did that, a pyramid on a bike,

20:00 a bloke standing on his hands on a bike riding the bike backwards. I originally got that job but I rode the bike into the lake so they took me off that. I finished up, we had a six foot ladder mounted on the bike and you set the bike in second and you are doing about fifteen or twenty miles per hour and you just climb the ladder, and it is just pure balance because the old Harley Davidson, it will sit. And we just rode around on that and everyone thought you were clever.

20:30 The other one I had I was the clown, and a corporal used to ride the bike and I was in the sidecar, and he would lift the sidecar up and I would take the wheel off and give it to him. The other one I was still the clown and they had a modified jeep and it looked as though no-one was driving it, and I was the clown and the jeep had near misses and that. We spent a few weeks

21:00 at that and then we did the Tattoo. And then they sent me up to a place called Diggers Rest and that was the transmitting troop. Everything came from Albert Park to Diggers Rest by landline and then the aerials were there and we used to fire and transmit to the world. Conversely, the receiving

21:30 troop was a place called Rockbank and they used to receive it and then landline. I went up there as a driver. And they were just in the throes of putting the first underground landline between Diggers Rest and Rockbank because they had great trouble, the people used to, with the overhead route with about fifteen or twenty pairs of copper wire and people would pull up and knock off all the copper because it was worth selling,

22:00 so they got this and they were putting it all underground. The thing was to drive the fellows out to the work place of a morning and spend the day out there working with them or something, and there I learnt to do underground line work. It is was then all lead covered and you had to do special knots, solder it, and then when it was all done that end was

22:30 sealed and then you sealed this with lead wrapping and all that, and at that end you then put gas in and the pressure has got to maintain, and if not you have a leak and then you have to damn well find it. Anyway I learnt to do underground line work and all that type of thing, and whilst I was there the line troop as they call them came down and they erect the aerials so they wanted someone to do it and I said I would do that.

23:00 So I became the driver while they were there and as a result learnt to do the overhead work as well. The London aerial was the tallest; it was over a hundred feet. Washington was a similar one and there was a few others on wooden poles, they were magnificent wooden poles, but in the main they had these

seventy foot high steel poles and they used to put

23:30 these up and do it, and you could let the wires down with them but on the wooden poles you couldn't. If a lightning strike broke an insulator you had to climb up and do it. Our boss at the time, he used to stutter badly and his great saying was with his stutter was that, "I am not here to wave big flags or beat big drums," and he used to go, "Bah, bah, bah, bah." We had this little Scots bloke who used to sit on top of the London

24:00 aerial and take photos of him as he was telling him to come down and, "Not be so bah, bah, bah bloody stupid," and that used to provide entertainment for us.

All the while were you starting to worry that Korea was going to be over before you had to a chance to get there?

Yes I was, and they used to get my transfer religiously – every week they used to get one. Every week there used to be one in. Doug Hall used to tell me, "It was a bah, bah, bah, waste of bah, bah, bah, bloody time," but however I used to put them in.

24:30 That went on and I did that. And then the other line troop left and I went back to working on that and then we had no water and I used to drive the tanker, and we used to have to do two trips a day to a place called Sunbury to maintain the water in the camp. We only had thirty people there but

25:00 we washed, drank, cooked, did everything in that that I used to get it every day. Eventually we changed commanders and the boss called me up, the new boss as he was, called me up and said, "You have finally made it. You have got your transfer." And so I went back down to AHQ in Albert Park and I was there a week

25:30 and then I went to what was then, current people would deny that it ever existed, but it was 4 Battalion, and that was the training battalion, and the army had matured to Korea a lot and the infantry could not supply the requirement for Korea at the time.

26:00 Initially 3 Battalion went into Korea and they had to get people from Australia and 1 Battalion to make up the numbers to go from Japan into Korea because they were occupation. 1 and 2 Battalion had come home and 3 was preparing to come home when it broke out. 1 Battalion provided a bit over a company in bulk

26:30 and there was a few odds and sods went in. And then in '51, 1 Battalion left Australia and did its twelve months, so that gave us two battalions in Korea at the same time. And the infantry couldn't fulfil its role it was running short of troops so they started what they call the corps conversion and that is how I got in. They went to,

27:00 came from every corps – artillery, armoured infantry and signals and all that – and went to Ingleburn and did a training course there and became infantrymen again, and then went to Japan and did more training and then allocated the units from there. I landed back at Ingleburn but up in the old battalion lines, not down where I had done my recruits' and

27:30 the training there was fairly hard and intensive and we trained at Greenhills and it culminated in what came to be known and it was fairly infamous, known as the Putty March. Being signals I was in the special, they wouldn't let me away from signals.

28:00 No matter how I tried they wouldn't let me away from signals. Anyway I was in E Company and I was in signals. E Company was the supporting arms, which were anti-tank, mortars, machine guns and pioneers. So they took us up the Putty Road, which at that stage was gravel and not very well maintained at all, to a place called Howe's Valley, and

28:30 from there we marched into Singleton training area – we didn't go into the camp. We did our march and then we did an exercise night and day all firing against and doing everything against an enemy, and the pioneers were the enemy so they cut the telephone lines and moved mortar marks

29:00 and they did all the things to keep you out of bed as it were. Anyway when that was finished we went into Singleton Camp, which was then disused, and we got a wash and shave and a shower and all that type of thing. And we set off and we marched to Windsor, which gave us a hundred twenty-five miles or something, and we did it in four and a half days

29:30 and had a high casualty rate. The mortars, the signallers carried their radios and we shared a radio between two and we maintained communications on the march. The mortars had to carry three mortar bombs each, one weighing ten pound, and so did the anti-tank gunners because the anti-tank weapon of the time was a seventeen pounder,

30:00 a great artillery piece. They had to carry three mortar bombs, and the pioneers, they carried their picks and shovels and all that, so everyone is carrying in the vicinity of about thirty to forty pound and that is in addition to all your other stuff. The idea was you start off this morning and the cooks would go to a grid reference on the road and

30:30 there you would get lunch. I might add, right from the time we got off the trucks until we got to

Windsor we had bully beef and biscuits three times a day. You would get your lunch, and half an hour after the bloke leading us, who was labouring under the weight of an empty packet of a water bottle, half an hour after he hit the serving point the last meal was served,

31:00 so anyone who was blistered or chaffed or having a hard time, if he didn't get there in that half hour he didn't get dinner. The time the cooks picked up and they went to the next grid reference and you marched to there and the same applied. So we were then sort of get the cooks to give you a bit extra and then you would keep some for your mate if

31:30 he was coming in or anyone was coming in. We had some quite horrific foot injuries because there was very little traffic and we were forbidden to get a lift of any kind, and there was quite some severe injuries overall. I do believe he lost seniority and we had quite a few blokes hospitalised and it became quite notorious over time because

32:00 you are marching for quite a bit of distance. You are marching all through the ranges. It is all sealed now and you can't recognise it, but in those days it was fairly marching on this loose gravel road and up and down hills – it was fairly tough. However I was one of those that got through okay and that was all right and that was the end of the training as it were.

It doesn't seem very infantry orientated.

We were

32:30 corps conversions and a lot of them were soft, really soft, and most of us were I think, and I think they felt we had to be hardened up. I don't know, but just to flog blokes over about four and a half days, no-one could see the sense in it at all. But that was it and we did it. There was some fairly serious injuries.

33:00 One bloke I was told that he somehow or other the heel of his foot, the skin on the heel of his foot became detached somehow. I don't know how that happened but I didn't see him, I don't know but I will say I never ever run into him again. Whether he got or was discharged medically I don't know, but I do know there was some fairly serious injuries and it didn't make rhyme or reason just to do it. Whether it was just to toughen us up I don't know.

33:30 That was the culmination of it, of the training there, and with that I set off into Japan. I was posted, we used to travel, our authority to travel then was known as a Mob 3, and you actually had to sign those and it showed who you were, what you were, where you

34:00 were going and what time you left and all that so if there was an inordinate amount of time between leaving and arriving they had you. Anyway I was posted to 3RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] and I took it I was to go straight from Australia to 3RAR because I wasn't the normal run of the mill infantryman, I was a signaller.

Was there a minimum age for being sent overseas at that stage?

34:30 Yes, I found out after all my business that you couldn't legally go unless you were nineteen. I didn't know that in my first twelve months. It wasn't until I got over, actually I think I was back in Australia when I found out you had to be nineteen to go to Korea. We left, a mob of us left the unit and we went to Marrickville, which was the

35:00 leave and transit depot, and they didn't forward us on there. They held us there and formed us into what they call a draft of troops and we were put in charge of this one captain, and on the day we were on the old propeller driven DC6 or whatever it was and we went from Darwin, we went from Sydney to Darwin,

35:30 that was all right. And we went to Labuan in Borneo and we spent the night there. Next morning they said they had to do something with the aircraft, I think it was fuel or something, I am not sure which, and so they took us and showed us the war cemetery at Labuan while they did what they ever had to do with the plane.

36:00 We took off from there and we went to Hong Kong and that was an experience. That was in the old airport and you went down between the hills. There was this hill and you went down around this hill and for most of the way you are looking into people's front door as you go down. When we landed the aeroplane seemed to do something like that (demonstrates)

36:30 and someone said that wasn't good. We landed and we taxied and we got off and we were taken to a bus because we all had a rifle and they took us to the Hong Kong Police Station – And that was as big an armoury as I have ever seen. They had mortars, machine guns and everything in there. – in this bus and we had to leave our weapons in there.

37:00 Then we went to the hotel where we stayed. The thing that struck me most of all in that when we were travelling on the bus we had this side track and we were only travelling slowly, and there is all these people sitting under a like a little three cornered bag arrangement like a tent and they were hand placing the lucky stones about that big and building the bed of the road

37:30 with individual stones. The thing that made me laugh, they had a roller. It would have to be fifteen or

twenty feet high and they had a couple of hundred people in the front or either side of it and we were stopped waiting and it was great to watch. Everyone would pull and they would pull this roller and they would get it going and they would go like the clappers and run, and when they got so far the mob at the back would start

38:00 putting the brakes on and they would stop, and then the mob that were pulling turned around and went that way and they would stop, and that is how they would roll their road after these people had placed them. We had twenty minutes or more watching this – it was fantastic to watch. Anyway we got into the hotel and they said this bloke made a bad landing and we were going to be there for three days –

38:30 dreadful. We were going to be in Hong Kong for three days and the big worry then was did you have enough money? We stayed there and of course we got up to all the trouble that soldiers get up to, and I still reckon I should have a green and gold blazer because they had rickshaws in Hong Kong in those days and they said, "We are going to have a rickshaw race. All drivers or pullers in there." And we pulled the rickshaws

39:00 and I beat the Poms but I won the race and they still won't give me a green and gold blazer. Anyway we were there for three days and we had a whale of a time.

Tape 4

00:32 **Can I just backtrack a little bit, Syd, to when you very first found out you were going to Korea? How did they tell you?**

Just on the parade one day, "The following are warned for draft." That was it, you were just warned for draft and that meant once you were warned for draft that meant no leave and you just were there until, then the parades became a bit more frequent and

01:00 you would say, "Back here in four hours. You have got to have an extra needle. Back here at a certain time because so and so…" and just things like that.

How did you feel, because that's what you wanted?

I was elated, over the moon – this is what I had been after. In that time at 4 Battalion before I went they used to say, "You have got to have your needles in a certain time,"

01:30 and you would get so many needles, and then they would send you in the bush and then you would miss out on the next one so you would have to start again, and a man was like a blooming pin cushion. They'd give you all these needles and things like that and you would miss out and you just got needle after needle after needle and they never seemed to get them in until… But eventually I must have got them all right and they said, "You are warned for draft."

02:00 **Did you get pre-embarkation leave?**

Yes, when you are right and everything is right and your final up there, I think we got five or seven days, I am not sure.

What did you do for that?

I just went home to my sister's place in Bondi Junction. Met my mates and a few things like that and went and visited a few people before I went away. Just sort of went around

02:30 and went on because I was over the moon.

Besides all your army kit, could you take any other personal effects with you?

No, no, that was it. One, you were travelling by air and of course always then the weight restriction, and you travel with what the army said you took. And you had to do kit inspection and that you had everything. Things like your dog tags were stamped properly and needles were up to date, you were dentally fit, medically fit,

03:00 boots were in good repair, everything like that, just that you were ready to go. I just did the normal, whatever blokes do, spent a fair amount of time at the pub and that was it. We got to Hong Kong and we stayed in the hotel there for three days while they had to do something with the landing gear of the aeroplane.

03:30 And I never found out what it was but then we landed, we went there and we pulled in, I don't know what for but we spent about an hour or more, I don't know what for, on the ground at Okinawa. And we saw all kinds of aeroplanes but the one I remember seeing was the big B29, a few of them taking off while we were there. What they were doing and where they were going I

04:00 have no idea, but I remember distinctly these B29s. Then we got to a place called Iwakuni, which is the airfield, and we were taken from there by bus. And we got on a boat and we travelled for hours in this boat and eventually we came to the town of Kure, which is where the headquarters of Australian troops

and that were,

04:30 and we were put in a bus and taken out to the holding tank or transit camp at a place called Hiro. In a way it was a bit of a shock, it was a bit of a culture shock there. It was different to anything I had seen. It was even different to Hong Kong. We were near a paper mill

05:00 and the stench was just beyond belief, and this was there twenty-four hours a day every day. It is something like dried or rotten seaweed type of thing it was. It was really lovely. They informed us that this captain had left all our papers in Hong Kong but

05:30 they were phoning through and they would be up and that was good.. The upshot was the next phone call was that the papers are not here, they are gone so whether the communists had them I don't know but they never turned up. They said, "If you haven't got papers, you have to go and do the battle school here. There is a course just about finished so you will be here for a little while before you do that.

06:00 The other good thing, you have got to have all your needles again." The bloke giving the needles there would be the worst, not only in the Australian Army but anybody's army. He used to throw the damn thing like a dart; he was awful. We had to get all the needles again and we had to be rechecked right through dentally and medically, all the way through. We

06:30 used to do training there. It was marches, plenty of firing and things like that. And the great thing I remember about that, we had this sergeant, he was a tough man, a good bloke, and we had to go to this place called Kawajiri for night firing. And you went up into the hills so far

07:00 and over the rice paddies and into this little shallow valley, and you used to fire against the base of the hill opposite. We were up there and we had a good night firing and the humour was pretty light, and the Japanese didn't have many livestock and to fertilise their rice paddies they have what they call a honey pot,

07:30 and that is like a well, and they have it in a convenient place in their land holding and all the nightsoil goes into it, and they have been doing it for hundreds or possibly thousands of years, and they mix her up good and they dip it out and they put it on the rice paddies. We had this big whingeing Pommy, oh God he was a whinger. When you are carrying the Bren gun in a section it weighs twice as much as anything else, it weighs about twenty pounds

08:00 and so it travels up and down the section so everybody gets it. This bloke is running last and he is whingeing and going on and all that, and the track did a left-hand turn and he didn't take the left-hand turn, plomp, and here he is in this foul smelling pit. I was talking to this old sergeant last Anzac Day about this and this bloke, "Get me out! Get me out! Get me out! Oh God, get me out!" and all the sergeant would say is,

08:30 "Get the so and so Bren gun, get the so and so Bren gun, get the so Bren gun." So eventually he had to dive down and he got the Bren gun and we got the Bren gun out and we got him out. All the way home, "It is somebody's turn on the Bren gun," and no-one would take it off him. And stink! They finished up marching him under the shower with all his gear on and they got him

09:00 undressed and they smiled kindly on him and replaced all his clothing. To see this bloke standing there having a smoke saying, "Get the so and so Bren gun," I've never forgotten. I was talking to him the other week on Anzac Day and he said, "Yeah, I remember that." He said, "Can you imagine the paperwork if I had to go back and say the Bren gun is lost?" We did that.

A few blokes have told us that the

09:30 **battle school there was one of the hardest things they have ever done in their life.**

From there after a period of time, I don't know how long we went to, the battle school had finished up there and we had to go through the battle school. All we were doing to all intent and purposes was wasting time or waiting out, and we used it by

10:00 shooting and marching and getting tougher. And this battle school was at a place called Haramura. It was an old Japanese army camp and it used to fit over a hundred men in one big long hut, possibly up to a hundred and fifty men. Each side was built up about hip high and you walked through the centre and you had very much like nowadays in

10:30 recruit training. You just had your army gear and that was it, no security or anything. Then you did all the things that you were expected and all the instructors there were ex Korean – they all did their time in Korea. You used to do individual weaponry, section tactics, platoon tactics, night tactics,

11:00 minefields because there a lot of mines in Korea and that at night. It all culminated and they used to bring the Kiwis [New Zealanders] up because the Kiwis had a regiment of artillery in Korea, and they had one or two guns at Haramura and when you were doing this attack the mortars used to get into it and the artillery used to get into

11:30 it on these two guns, and you attacked up this slope and that was the culmination. And from that when you went up there you were taken up by truck. When you finished your training there you marched back to Hiro. After you had done this attack you formed back and marched back to Hiro, and that was a

month's course. It was very well thought out,

12:00 very well administered and very well taught. I say us blokes who had the benefit of that going into Korea, we were as good as they ever wanted you to be for your first time in. It was physically tough and that, and again you had all the chase the bugle type of thing. Haramura was sort of in a

12:30 valley and there was a range of hills there, and opposite the gate, I suppose three quarters of a mile, maybe a mile, was the highest peak of the range. If for any miscreants you would take the lantern up and I would bring it down and they would time you and if you were too slow you took it back up again. Those type of things. But you were treated there very much as

13:00 men and it was very adult outlook on everything. There was no illegitimacy or anything, everything was fair dinkum, straight from the shoulder. You knew what you had to do and you got up and did it. If you didn't – up the bloody hill you went. There was very good. And I think everyone could say it was hard. Well it was hard but we were young, we were fit, and bring it on again type of

13:30 thing. It was all right and I did that. When I got back to Hiro there were five of us they pulled out and they said, "Don't get rid of your gear," and I said, "Why? Are we going to Korea?" They said, "No, you are going to Haramura." I said, "What?" They said, "You are going back there to do the signals course." Again I made my feelings known and again I lost and I went back to Haramura and

14:00 I did a signals course up there in a different company this time. They used to teach signals, pioneers, mortars and machine guns. We were on parade one morning… No, we woke up early, that's right. There was a big explosion and everyone said, "It is just the pioneers mucking around," and

14:30 we went on parade and this Jap [Japanese] came flying in and he said – that Australians were known as goshu, Australia is goshu. Sunda is dead, or end. And he came flying in the yelling out, "Goshu boys sunda." The powers that be got in a jeep and went with him and apparently there was a Canadian and two Australians, or two Canadians,

15:00 I can't remember just how many. Anyway they had been doing something with explosives and they only surmise what had happened but the upshot is that they were all killed. They got across a charge somehow or other. But I have heard various versions, but that happened while I was there. One of the Australians I knew very well because I had been with him at Ingleburn and

15:30 I knew him quite well, and he was killed there. That was all that was significant there. And I did the course and then I went back to Hiro and then they I was only there a week or a fortnight and I went to Korea. There were two boats, one was the Esang and one was the Wosang.

16:00 They took us down to the wharf by truck. And it wasn't a very big ship and the funnel was right in the middle and the holds, I suppose they were called, and one was in the front and one was in the back. And we went up the gangplank and we turned and we are walking along this passageway and there is this great heap of fish, I'll never forget this, and blokes were walking over the fish

16:30 and this fellow said, "Don't stamp your feet. That is your dinner." We all marched over this and we had to go down into this hold and this was rather a frightening experience because there was just enough room. It had been done out by carpenters and there was just enough room with all your pack on to get down. And it had been made, we were briefed beforehand, it had been made out of three by twos, or four by twos, vertical and horizontals

17:00 with canvas stretchers on them. And we were told you go down the bottom and back and you fill up like that. That is how we filled up and so there was about a hundred of us odd in there with this one little bloody hole the only way to get out. And there was one lonely little light globe that swung with the ship, no light fitting or anything, must have been 12 or 24 volts I suppose, and that was us. And I think everyone just sat there and looked at the hatch cover.

17:30 There is no way if anything would have happened you would have got out. That was on the Wosang.

You weren't allowed to stay above deck?

No, no, you were down there and that was it and that was it all the way. It was very uneventful. The only time you were allowed to come up and there was nowhere to go, you went past this bench and you got fed your meal and you found wherever you could to sit and eat your meal

18:00 out of your dixie that you washed and put back in your pack. We did that and we arrived at Pusan. We got off the train at Pusan. Now Pusan at that time was all humpies made out of cardboard packing cases, flattened tin and all that, and I don't think because of the shortage of materials

18:30 there was no building size buildings, it was all little humpies and they were all side by side with mutual support and all that. Stink! It stunk like hell! All the drains were open and all that type of thing because in the course of the war at one stage they formed the Pusan bridgehead and they looked like being pushed into the sea until MacArthur pulled

19:00 the Inch'on landings. It had been heavily shelled and virtually destroyed so the civil population had made accommodation out of whatever they could, where they could, and that is all they could do. It was very devastating to see these poor devils. And they put us in the train and all the little kids

19:30 from this high up begging for food or whatever they could get, and the Yankee [American] Provos [Provosts – Military Police], mostly Yankee Provos, a few Australians there, were keeping them away from the train and all that because as far as they were concerned they were thieves and rogues and reprobates, where in fact they were starving the poor cows. And

20:00 that was a sight to see as everything was devastated. The railway station only had a few uprights, there was no roof on it or anything like that, and there was debris everywhere. There were even a couple of bodies laying around that hadn't been collected, things like that. Up until that stage we all had weapons but we had no ammunition, and for the train ride north we were all issued with fifty rounds of ammunition.

20:30 We got on the train and we were given, I think it was an American C ration and we got on the train and we went to a place called Tokch'on.

What was your personal weapon at this stage?

Rifle.

303?

Yeah, the old Mark I rifle. The

21:00 automatic weapons were NCOs' [Non Commissioned Officers], section 2ICs [Second in Command] and things like provos and that. Tokch'on. And there the battalion's transport was lined up, 1/3 Battalion and 2 Battalion's transport lined up and you were just shepherded onto your battalion's transport. Then it was a damn long drive north on a dirt coloured dirt road

21:30 which was called the MSR, the main supply route up to B Echelon. That is the rearward, most stalwart of a battalion. And the echelons are normally grouped. There is B Echelon and A Echelon. And part of the battalion, the fighting part of the battalion, is the F Echelon. In the B Echelon we got there and it was still in summer gear and so we had

22:00 no need for reissue of clothing. They gave us a sleeping bag and a few things and we had to be briefed and wait for guides. There I met the notorious, and I think he finished up in later years as a General Sung, but he was Captain Sung at that time. And

22:30 all forces, the Americans had the KATUSAs [Korean Augmentation to the United States Army] and the Commonwealth Division had the KATCOMs [Korean Army Troops attached to Commonwealth Division], which was Koreans attached to the Commonwealth Division. The Yanks had the Koreans attached to the United States. He used to rule these blokes with an iron hand and they feared him greatly because he would shoot them as soon as he looked at them. Life meant nothing to him.

23:00 I met him smacking a few of them around there and a couple of us in the group said, "Bugger him, let him have it," and a couple in the group said, "Don't interfere. You stay right out of it. That is Korean business, that is not yours." We waited around there and we had a meal and I remember that and then the guides come and took us up to, I went to battalion headquarters because in those days the signallers

23:30 were at battalion headquarters. They later changed that. And there I met my platoon commander whom I had known in Australia, and I met the platoon sergeant and I was allocated into the platoon and started my work with the battalion. What happened then?

What sort of work were you doing at that stage?

In the first instance they put me on a line checkpoint

24:00 and I was A to D Company. And the checkpoint really consists of a safe pit, and you are in there with your mate and there is two rows of brass screws and two wires come in here and two wires come in here and they are joined on to make the circuit, and if a line goes out they ring you and say, "Line to D Company is out," so you test

24:30 the line to D Company and the line to D Company is out, so then you have to go out and fix it and find the fault and fix it. I had, from memory I had twenty pair to look after from memory, yeah, I am not sure now, ten on a point. I think I had twenty pair to look after. You get your quiet and good times on that and it all depends where your lines run,

25:00 how bad it is. If they are running in safe areas you get to know what safe areas are fair enough. If it is not a safe area you say, "I am not going out there until I get two or three fellows with me." An age old tactic ever since telephone lines have been in vogue that you cut the line and wait for Charlie to come along and fix it, and then you nab Charlie. I had nothing like that in

25:30 my time on that checkpoint at all.

Had you heard about blokes that had been captured and things like that?

I have heard of people who knew someone who knew someone, but I haven't known anyone. We used to say the third toilet on the left, if you got it from there it wasn't worth worrying about, but if you come to the second or first toilet then there was something in it. I never knew anyone that did but I believe it happened a few times in the Second World War

26:00 but to my knowledge it didn't happen in Korea. Because the mobile part of the war was over, well over by the time I eventually got there. You sat on a hill and he sat on a hill and you both sat on a hill looking at each other sitting on a hill until night-time. If you did movement

26:30 untoward, he would let you know he didn't appreciate it with mortars or artillery. If he did something, you would let him know that you didn't appreciate it. But other than that you tolerated each other fairly well. As always, once you are there you are never still because the trenches have got to be… The CO that I had at that time, mainly for morale and all that type of thing,

27:00 you had to sweep out the crawl trenches all the time. You couldn't put a cigarette butt there. You would have to clean the whole thing out. You are improving your overhead cover, you are improving the depth all the time to make the position more safe against all kinds of fire and all that. You are trying to improve the route that the telephone lines take and all that type of thing.

27:30 You are rigging up little, if you can get a decent enough tin you put a little microphone in that for the diggers so they can listen, and make like a loudspeaker so they can listen to the radio or wire up a, someone had stolen a headlight off a Yankee jeep, you would wire that up so he would have a light for his hootchie [tent fly shelter].

They were quite prized, weren't they?

Yes, you see if you got a headlight you had your high and low filament, so if one filament burnt you had the other one so it lasted longer and that type of thing.

28:00 There is activity going on all the time. Of course there are meals and some positions you are in you ate rations In some positions you are in you made your way down behind and got fed, so it would just depend on where you were and how that went.

What were the fresh rations like over there?

That depended upon the time of year.

28:30 I am not being facetious there. Summer time you got British Australian rations as it were, and in the winter time you tended to get American rations which were, they might be snap frozen, but the potatoes and all that came in plastic bags peeled, the pumpkins came in plastic bags peeled in pieces and all that

29:00 whereas the other it was all whole. The rations I would say in all cases the rations were good until the cooks got hold of them and then that was a different thing. The standard of cooking varied from cook to cook. The other thing was when you were on Pommy rations or that you got great culinary delights as we called it, plastic spud, dehydrated

29:30 potato, and that was bad enough until you came to dehydrated cabbage and they just used to slide off the spoon in slime and that was that. You got dehydrated egg and because with that you could never get a fried egg you always got a scrambled egg with that. You would hit it and it would quiver like a jelly. It depended on the time of year.

30:00 Around at Christmas time, which was winter, you got American turkey and you got sick of chicken because the Yanks have a lot of chicken and turkey and all that type of stuff. If you did a twenty-four hours out then you took a ration pack of some sort with you or something like that. .

What were the hard tack rations like back then?

You got American C rations, Australia didn't have, other than bully beef they didn't have a ration like that, you just had the bully beef and that.

30:30 You got the American C rations but the wartime K rations were gone. They went before I got there. They were there in the beginning but in my time it was C rations, and I forget but you had like an A, B, C, D and an E and an F I think, mixed kinds, and the variations was in the main meal. And each one had

31:00 about an eight ounce, not a very big tin of fruit. One would be pears, peaches or fruit salad and you get a variation there. There was a lot of, they used to call them a jelly. It was about that thick and that round. I had false dentures from a very young age and you would bite into it and then you couldn't get your teeth out, so you would pull it out and get your teeth and then have another go. And

31:30 the blokes with their own teeth never used to mind them. A lot of chewing gum. But you never got what we used to say brew rations because the Yanks have coffee, but there is no sugar. At that time also the American rations never contained butter or any equivalent thereof so there used to be a black market between us, our caterer because the company sergeant cook was the company caterer

32:00 and in our company, and I think in every company, they would decide they would forego butter to trade with the Yanks and get extra rations from the Yanks because the trading ratio would be about eight or

ten to one, so we were living like kings just by doing away with butter.

Most diggers had the assumption that headquarters get looked after very well.

I am in battalion headquarters, not the headquarters back there where they are paying taxi fares or tram lines or something.

32:30 We were the signallers and you are attached to the headquarters but you are not sitting right in the headquarters. The administrative part of it, except a very small cell, is back at A Echelon. The headquarters up here consisted of the CO with his battle advisers and that and the adjutant and a couple of clerks – there is a very small administrative side. These are the blokes that actually plan and fight

33:00 and route the patrols and all that.

How many blokes were in your signals section?

You had six, in the battalion at that stage used to have over fifty blokes but you had a couple detached to each company. You had people on standby to lay and fix lines you had people charging batteries, you had the forward and central and

33:30 main radio station, the forward control, so although you were 50 of you, you were dispersed throughout the battalion. Where there was a lot of line you had us blokes detached out on these points because the two blokes in the rifle company had very little time because they have to maintain the radio twenty-four hours a day and travel with the OC [Officer Commanding] so it is a more inter working thing all the time. So you are not in a nice comfortable headquarters watching the other fellows doing the

34:00 work. It is all that and you can get switched around, but all your records and the command and control emanates from the sig platoon commander, who is the signals or communications adviser to the CO, so you are out there like a nigger in whatever you were doing.

How did you go with the cold, because I know earlier on they had big troubles?

Earlier on they had it on, but when it came for us to get it I was fortunate because we used to be issued

34:30 with the cold wet weather gear, the CW, and the boots were, you got the same size boot but they were more vertical, more of the vertical side and you used to wear an inner sole in those and the idea was when you put your foot down and took the weight it squashed the warm air from underneath and brought it up around the boot. When you lifted the foot the foot rose and

35:00 the warm went underneath and got warm until you put your foot down so you got this constant air movement around your foot.

Did they work?

They were good. And you had special socks and then you started from the skin out. You had long john type underpants and then like a fairly thick blanket, you had underpants and then you had double thickness, and in some cases

35:30 around the knees four thickness of woollen proof trousers. Then you had a string singlet and then you had a like a flannelette sweater, a flannelette shirt, like the old grey flannel thing, you had that over that. This string was like a tennis net and it again when you looked at it was about that thick so that was warm air to circulate.

36:00 Then the flannel over that and then the woollen shirt over that, then your jumper then the combat smock and then the parka so you were warm. Then you had gloves with the mittens with the index finger for a trigger and then another leather glove over that. The parka had a thing out here and it had malleable wire so you could squeeze it right in or open it

36:30 right out or throw it back altogether. You had good clean and the winter sleeping bag was double thickness.

In the middle of winter would you be wearing all that clobber and being in your sleeping bag?

No, your sleeping bag was very good. It was double thickness, two sleeping bags, one inside the other. The thing was that you

37:00 were awake every hour or thereabouts because whether you wanted to or not you had to get up normally on the change of the picket or that you would fire a shot in the air anywhere where it wouldn't do any harm and that kept your weapon warm otherwise it would freeze. You fired at least one shot and you slept with your rifle in with you.

37:30 The thinking of the time, the official thinking was you wore the minimum, so most times if you were sitting doing nothing you most probably would have your combat smock on but seldom did you wear a parka. It was just too heavy and too hot with all that on. Quite often you would be back down to your sweater, and if you were working it is very easy to raise a sweat, and you'd have your shirt off

38:00 if you were digging a position or something like that. Even on the coldest days you could work up a sweat fairly easy. Until just before the fall when the cold wind comes, I forget the name of that, they did have a name for the wind and it is the laziest wind ever. It goes through everything, it comes down north to south down the peninsula. In the most times you would be in sweater I would say and possibly

38:30 if you were out on patrol at night you would be in combat smock or possibly a parka depending on how far and the nature of the patrol.

Did you have to teach blokes to be careful with heat regulation, getting too hot and sweating and getting cold?

You do you police each other. When you had been there for a while and if you were one who went into winter there you used to watch the newcomers because

39:00 in your own little hootchie you would have some way of heating water and that, but you would see the newcomer come in and he would shave away and lather up and he would get the razor and it would skid across because it had all gone straight to ice, or he'd wash his hair and then go to comb it, it would be full of ice and he couldn't comb it. You would have to show him little bits, that is the only way you could do it.

Tape 5

00:34 **You were talking about the privations of winter.**

Winter is, see everyone is underground for self-explanatory reasons and the heating, the common thing was to get the jerry can and take the side out of it and fill it with dirt

01:00 and sand or whatever you could get, and using whatever you liked or whatever you could get, clothes pegs or that if you could get it. You get a 4-gallon drum and you would kink, put a tube in it and then kink it, and then you would let the end of the pipe go down in this dirt or sand, and then that with petrol… Because petrol was used like water there. I have

01:30 never seen petrol like it. And it used to be dyed a distinctive red colour to save the black market knocking it off. And when you got enough in there just throw a match in it. Of course if you have ever seen petrol it is a dirty yellow flame and it blows smoke. The blokes would be there and they would have their combat suit on and the hood and they would pull it down and that is about it. They would get up in the morning and wash this and of course at the end of the winter they would undo that and there would be their choofer neck

02:00 with unshaven and dirty and all that, and everyone used to be accused of having this choofer neck and that is where that dirty black grime come and that is how you used to keep warm, was try and do that. They later brought in a properly manufactured one with a chimney and you could regulate the drips through a little peephole, but this was self made and that is how you kept yourself warm. If you could knock off a Yankee sleeping bag

02:30 or get a Yankee sleeping bag, lots of trading with the Yanks. You did anything to keep warm. And in your hootchie, which was become a bunker, you would make yourself a bed. And sigs always going crook because the diggers are knocking off your wire. Even with stuff bound around to save time and all that, barbed wire, there was millions of yards of barbed wire there, anything you could get to make a bed

03:00 because the barbed wire entanglements were on. There were two pickets, there was the star picket which you buy in the shops now, and there was one had a side and was like that to give it strength, and the side had notches in it so you would drive it in and hook the wire in that, the channel picket, and you make your hootchie out of wire of any kind and channel pickets, and you make your hootchie to keep you off the ground. Inside the bunker or the hootchie,

03:30 depending on what you had, that you were down out of the wind and all that type of thing so your temperature was fairly constant. But in a way they used to be quite beautiful because the ground used to freeze down to I don't know what depth and the water would ooze out in icicles and it would all look like crystals down the side of the bunker.

04:00 It used to be quite pretty until somebody said, "You have got to dig a hole here," for some reason, and the idea we used to pour a bit of petrol on and set it alight and scrape it out and put petrol on, scrape it out before it froze that is how you dug because it was solid ice. The Pommy tank regiment was moving for some reason or moving a lot of tanks at the time I was there, and on the Injin River I saw eight tanks. And the Centurion weighed just

04:30 over fifty ton a piece and so there is eight of them driving around on the river, so what depth it froze to I don't know. I also don't know what happened to him but on our side of the river just near the pintail bridge as it was known, if you stopped and looked over there was this bloke like an upside down frog looking at you and he was under some depth of ice

05:00 and don't know he was a white Caucasian, I don't know if a Yank or Canadian I don't know what he was,

but he was there all the winter because they reckon it wasn't worth blowing or goodness knows what to get him out. And when it thawed enough someone tied a rope to his foot and held him there until they come and collected him. But he was there for months. I don't know just how deep it goes but my coldest day – I got off light –

05:30 my coldest day was 27 below I think it was and the hottest day I think was 117 on the old scale. You have pretty good extremes of temperatures there.

What did you see of the other nationalities there?

Well we saw the Yanks because we used to go scrounging off the Yanks, and we saw a lot of Poms and it was no good going scrounging off them because they had nothing

06:00 and you couldn't understand them anyway. The Canadians, certain regiments we used to have a bit to do with the Canadians and we got on with the Poms fairly well. The Canadians are split in two, there is the Vandoo is the French Canadian and the white Canadian. Well you have a bit to do with the white Canadian. The Vandoos to my recollection were unpopular.

06:30 They were very much on their own and never had much to do with them at all. But wherever you could get booze or that which was the thing, you could do that and if you could get near to the Pommies, and their echelons were closer to than ours, they would sell to you. And the main one was we used to call is all slops but it was Alsops

07:00 and it used to come in a wooden box and each bottle had a straw hat. You would buy a case of beer and five or six of them would be broken all the time. That was that. But you never got a great deal. Depending upon what was going on we were allowed to have a couple of bottles or a bottle of something. We didn't have canned beer at that stage. The Yanks had canned beer – normally Budweiser or

07:30 Schlitz I think it was, and that was like drinking water. The drivers used to go back for various reasons and they had a sort of a fair sort of a black market going, and I don't know whether it was true or not but they said a water truck came up this day at the checkpoint and the bloke mucking around said, tapped the water tank with a stick,

08:00 bang, bang, "What have you got in here?" The top came open and out came these women – whether it was right or not I don't know. They reckon this bloke was running his own personal business with the water truck. I know they used to bring in, I am not sure I think it was Korean, it was called Lucky 7 Whisky and don't ask me where it was brewed or anything like that, but if a bloke drank it and

08:30 sweated, you could smell it coming out through the pores of his skin. Most of us wouldn't touch it but there was a few who did. Liaison, because you were kept busy, there was always something to do, there were only certain people who were able to move in and out of the battalion area, like drivers. As a foot soldier there was no need for you to move and if you were found beyond the confines

09:00 people would want to know why, so you were really circumstances kept you pinned in pretty well. You never knew when you were going to be called in for patrol; you never knew when you were being called for any duty.

Did you do patrols there?

Yes, I did a couple. Being sigs, see the platoon signaller is normally from his own platoon. He is not a trained signaller in the sense of the word.

09:30 You teach him radio procedure and the radios that we had at that stage, which is called an 88 set, was crystal controlled on four channels. So you taught him his voice procedure and that was him. Us blokes, we formed the company signaller and we were at company headquarters and we were trained radio operators and that, and we had more advanced training and consequently, unless it was something that required

10:00 a more powerful radio and more expertise in signalling, well the platoon signaller would look after it, and if it was something else we would go out. If the radio blokes, they were short due to illnesses… We had very few wounded or killed, the sigs, but you had people going on leave and people got sick, you have got to do a patrol on that so I did a couple. It wasn't normal for the company

10:30 sigs to go unless they sent out a company fighting patrol. That is when the whole company went out and you looked for a fight, which really unless there was something they wanted known or done or something made secure they were few and far between. It was normally just to deny him no-man's land. Right from the First World War Australians have always been

11:00 known for the fact that they dominate no-man's land. That would continue through the Second World War and it was so in Korea. I wasn't there, but the instance I heard of that the Canadians gave up patrolling, and I am not sure which regiment it was, but on one instance they called them to

11:30 mess and Charlie gave them so long and just came out of the holes he had dug and just got stuck amongst them. Almost wiped out a whole company before they were able to contain it, and that came because he was able to sneak right up under the wire and concealed himself and waited for the

opportune time. That never ever happened with Australians and we would never allow this. It is not our doctrine. We

12:00 patrol heavily, and from our patrols if we meet something we have a fight and we always clear the field afterwards and try and get our own back and do anything to get our own back, and if you come across a body or a prisoner or something like that you have got information that can be of use so it is always very strong.

Did you ever have any contacts when you went out on patrol?

Fortunately no, very fortunately, no.

12:30 I was not. You join up and you become a soldier with one idea. When you first hear that very sharp, naughty little crack go past your head it is not like a movie – you don't hear zings and zooms. If you have ever done any rifle shooting they talk about the crack and the thump, you get the crack of the round and the thump of the weapon going off because that travels and it is a vicious little crack. And

13:00 I don't care who you are, you will duck. Once you hear a couple of those your bravery seems for the brave, I'll tell you, and I wasn't one of those. I went out on two or three and nothing happened, thank goodness, but that was it. Apart from meeting someone of course on a daylight effort. I

13:30 once had the experience where we came up on a minefield marker. That is all right, but then the thing is which side of the minefield marker are you on? And so it turned out we were on the wrong side of the minefield marker. That is one of the most devastating feelings I think anyone,

14:00 I think most people will agree with me on that. People have a great fear of mines and those in command have really got to work at maintaining morale if you are in a minefield situation. We were fortunate – the training was that you can get down and with a little straw of grass you can look for

14:30 trip wires or you can gingerly prod looking for disturbed ground or that. The most common mine up there, it is known as a bouncing betty. All that sticks above the ground is three prongs like that, and going down it is able to move, and there is a little detonator there which ignites the fuse which sets off a

15:00 primary charge which sends a mortar bomb up anything from three to five feet, which explodes a sixty feet mortar bomb. That was the most predominant one if you looked for these three little prongs. We had this thing and blokes probed with the little thing and everyone just trod and we passed the thing and we got out

15:30 and there were no injuries or nothing went off, and it was put on the map and people warned about it. That would be, I'd say, one of the most frightening things.

Did you get mortared?

Yes.

That would be pretty frightening, isn't it?

It is but you have got your little hootchie but my hootchie was built when I got there and I steadfastly improved the overhead cover in the time that I had. We got mortared, it is not nice,

16:00 but rather than being near an explosion it was happening up and around outside, but I wasn't, I was worried.

A direct hit would still…?

A direct hit would do you in because the forces were going down. It doesn't have to come through to hurt you. It would blow the roof down on you or an artillery round. I was a bit fortunate. I was just back from

16:30 the crest underneath and nothing came right on top. I was mortared a few times, artillery fire a couple of times not pleasant, worrying. But by the same token you start getting phone calls, "This line is out." "Well let the bugger stay out. I am not coming out while this is on." Unless I was,

17:00 I was never under any great sustained barrage like the First World War that went on for a week or that, but a couple of hours sporadically and all that, and after a while you tend to say, "He seems to over that way, or that way, so I can get out and have a look and see if I can do this or do that."

Were you ever caught out fixing lines?

Once I was out and I was fixing it but it was over there and I found myself a little hidey-hole before he did any traversing.

17:30 And I was in another bloke's bunker with him when that came. But I was outside when the first eight or ten landed and all that does is add wings to the feet, I can tell you, but that is all. I was never really in any great close, they had to pull me out from a collapsed trench or anything like that, which some people were but I wasn't.

18:00 I was pretty fortunate in that regard; I got away with it fairly decently. As I say, mines would be the greatest fear and when other than that when you are going out the mine gap or the gap in the wire is always covered by fire or protected, and when you are going out there is always someone counting you out, “How many have you got?” “I have got twelve.”

18:30 So he counts twelve because it has been known for thirteen to come through. When you are going out on that you are all pumped up and the adrenaline is pumping and every bush looks like a bloke and you are expecting them to leap out of the bush and have at you, but after a while that tends to leave and you become more absorbed in what you are doing and that.

19:00 And I did although I spent my birthday doing a layout patrol, and that was in snow and we moved out at night and over the parkas we wore a white sheet, and we went out and I was the radio man and I had an officer and a sergeant and we got in the back

19:30 of this snow drift and tunnelled it out. And we had a little thing in which we were able to peg up with the weapons and that. We pegged up one of the sheets we were wearing and we just gingerly pulled that open and we did twenty-four hours in this snowdrift, just watching Charlie. And you just pull it along and pull it until you can see and pull the other side to see, and if we got anything we would radio it back. Nothing happened and then we waited until

20:00 nightfall and we came back in again.

How does that play on your nerves, being within sight?

You are too absorbed in what you are doing and worrying that somebody might come to think they are coming. In hindsight, he obviously didn’t know we were there. If he had found us he would have been into us with mortars or machine guns, which would have been a totally different kettle of fish. We just lay in the sand dunes for twenty-four hours

20:30 and come back like drowned rats because laying in the snow you get wet all the time. With no untoward motions you cuddle up to your mate to keep warm overnight while one is awake all the time. You don’t say you are going to do two hours when you go out like that, you say, “I will keep watch,” and you keep watch

21:00 and you start to nod off very quickly, and you might do twenty minutes or you might do an hour but you go through the night so that someone is awake. The last thing is you do you closed your eyes, because before you know it you are off like that and anything can happen so you make sure you keep yourself awake. That one weekend the officer said, “No fixed time limit. If you feel tired, you wake me.”

21:30 I woke him and he woke the sergeant and the sergeant woke me and that is how we worked it right through the twenty-four hours. When you got back inside the wire you were glad it was over but there was nothing untoward.

Did you do anything special for your birthday?

My sister had sent me a cake and she had a tin and she had made the cake and she had put a bottle of rum in it,

22:00 and when we got it and got the top off it the bottle had broken so we just cut that much off the cake and shared it around and that was my birthday when we got back. Birthday, everyone had a birthday, at least one in there, so if you were out in reserve you had a party, if you could have a few beers, but in the line you can’t do anything, there is not enough around to do.

22:30 I think I celebrated my birthday when I got back home. That was us.

When you first went, were you told how long you would be there?

Well you knew you did twelve months. The battalions did twelve months as an entity and individuals did twelve months. If for those who signed on for a second term they did eight months in the second term. After four months, I missed out on my first four

23:00 months. I went on R&R [Rest and Recreation] back in Japan. I was seven months before I got it and they just made it up that one and I had a fortnight’s leave in Ebisu in Tokyo.

How was that?

It was pretty good. It was pretty heavy. They had a wartime submarine base and whilst we never followed them it was common knowledge the Japs had made these big

23:30 tunnels, and the submarine used to submerge somewhere out to sea and come up through these tunnels and come up in Ebisu, and when they were going out they would sink in Ebisu and go out through these tunnels and come out in the open sea. How they maintained it or got through it I don’t know, but there were these submarine pens there and most of them had been bombed out or burnt out. But the living quarters were all double storeyed and we were looked after

24:00 like kings there. We came out of Korea and we got to the R&R centre and you walked in and you got out of everything and you had your shower and delouse and all that and into all new gear. You went to the

laundry each day and you got a new set of clothes every day, laundered clothes, they weren't new, they were laundered with the befitting badges and all that type of thing, and you got that and you wore that.

24:30 If you got mushy or anything like that you had a shower and got another set of clothes. So you were in fresh clothes every day. Meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner. If you wanted to be there, each lasted about two hours. Good range of meals and all that. They did everything they possibly could for your convenience while you were there. Pay you at any time,

25:00 you could get… The pay office was open most hours of the day and the paymaster who was there when I was there finished up doing time, although he never took any money but he broke every rule in the book. He would be sitting playing cards and his name was Poole, Norm Poole, and you would say, "Norm, I want some pay." He would say, "Have you got your pay book?" "Yes." And he would pull an acquittance roll he used to have in his shirt and he would pay you out of his bank roll and put his acquittance roll

25:30 back and away he went. They caught up with him and he finished up doing time out of it, but the best of my knowledge he never got away with any money but he made pay time very conveniently for the fellows. You could hang around the bars, you could do whatever you liked. I don't know whether they had a travel agency or that but this woman used to

26:00 have this little nook in the wall and she arranged for three of us, and we went up to a place called Niko and that is across the valley from Mt Fuji. And fortunate when I was there that all the strawberries, not strawberries, cherries, were in bloom, white and pink, and the green of the paddy field and Mt Fuji. I forget how much it cost us; it wasn't all that dear. We stayed in a hotel

26:30 and were looked after there. So we did the trip to Niko through this little travel agent or whatever you call her. Most of the fellows just hung around the bars and what went with it and things like that.

How did the Aussies treat the Japanese?

To my mind the Japanese were Japanese and we were Australian and that was it. When we went shopping, especially in Tokyo now

27:00 it was the first time I had seen these department stores because we didn't have them other than David Jones and Myers, but they were beautiful big stores. And the shop assistants were girls and they would bow to you and if they couldn't understand you they would get someone who would. And it was normal commerce to my mind, there was nothing untoward, I never saw anything untoward. I would say we were better

27:30 than the Yanks. We weren't masters or anything – the Yanks seemed to think they were. I think that we treated them as equals. I was never involved with anything with the Japanese except before I went to Korea there was a hell of a brawl in Kure and

28:00 the Japanese had just got there, or… No, they were just in the throes of getting independence or getting independence and the provos used to have a Canadian, a Red Cap [Military Police], an Australian or a Kiwi and a Japanese policeman in a jeep and they each used to try and deal with their own nationality. And the Poms and the Canadians used to leave the Australians and the Kiwis

28:30 alone if they could because the Australians didn't like them. The Kiwis or the Australians used to deal with us. The little Jap was there and there was this big brawl started and it finished up the provos were fighting for their own nationality. Someone turned the Japanese police loose with these, they used to carry a baton about that long

29:00 and they never used to strike with it. They used to poke the nerve centres and they had it over and done with in less than ten minutes flat. They were the masters very quickly, I tell you. I must confess I couldn't talk for about seven days because this bloke poked me in the throat and I lost interest. The blokes were sore for days afterwards with this poke and they were deadly, they were really deadly.

29:30 Everyone back to being what they were supposed to be after that, but that was the only time I was involved with the Japanese at all and the only time I ever heard of anybody being involved with the Japanese. I met him again in Malaya, a Kiwi, he looked like the size of that thing, he was enormous, and he used to always say, "Where is your horse, Aus?" I saw him one night and he had

30:00 an Australian under each arm, "Cut it out, Aus. You are going home and that's that." And he is guarding two blokes, a massive man, and he was in Malaya later on. Whenever he came along the Australians used to go quietly because he was too big. On the football field he would be running up the field laughing his head off with six or eight blokes hanging off him. They just couldn't bring him down, his thighs were like that, he was an enormous

30:30 man and he had a wonderful Maori sense of humour and all that type of thing.

What was the prostitution scene like in Tokyo?

It was there. I think it was there heavy. I suppose there was plenty of it but not all did it because

31:00 penicillin was just in its infancy and the doctor… Because when you got there, you got briefed. In those

days there was a thing called crystalline penicillin and it was worse than the disease, I think, from what I am told because it used to sting and burn and it was agonising to get. I remember at our briefing this doctor said,

31:30 "Any of you turn up with it," he said, "I will personally assure you that all your treatment will be crystalline penicillin and I bet you won't come back for a second dose." I knew a couple of blokes who had it and they said, "I am not going back," because it was deadly. That was one of the things they used against it. Conversely, I remember – not a pretty story – but

32:00 when we first got to Japan we had to go down to this dart thrower, as we called him, to get our needles, and it was a narrow long room and at one end there was this curtain across and we never took much notice of it. And we were sitting there and this voice said, "You sadistic bastard." What the hell? Anyway this bloke came out through the curtains and this fellow with

32:30 glasses on which were all askew was holding his face was saying, "Grab him! Grab him!" So the fellows grabbed him and we got him down and there was a thing known as a hockey stick which used to be inserted in the urethra to break out all the ulcers, and that is apparently what this fellow was doing when this fellow jobbed him. That turned us off very well. I never had a lot to do with prostitution after

33:00 that episode and the warning I got from this other bloke. But it was there; of course it was.

Before you would go on leave they would give you lectures and things?

We were lectured all the time about it. Apparently the Australians had it very heavy and the Yanks were worse because we used to be given a prophylactic outfit, which did not contain drugs. The Americans were given two penicillin tablets

33:30 every day and that was their prophylactic every day and they used to take them all the time. We used to get lectures and the prophylactics and if you did so indulge it was your duty, and you elected to go to the blue light room where there was always an attendant, and if you went to there the attendant would give you

34:00 two penicillin tablets in addition and make sure you showered and did everything you were supposed to do. But after seeing that I first got there and the hockey stick I used to be very careful, I can tell you, because it is not somewhere where you would want to indulge.

What sort of things did you buy in Tokyo?

Lots of things. Pearls, Mikimoto was in its infancy

34:30 and a lot of blokes used to buy pearls, cigarette lighters in abundance, cigarette cases, lacquer wear and mainly things for female members of your family. I suppose people would look on it as junk because unless you went home with the battalion you were coming home by air

35:00 and you wouldn't get much home, so you would send it home by post so the postage had a bearing on what you bought. Lacquer wear, music boxes, all that kind of stuff, generally junk wear. We had a bloke in Korea in the signals platoon and he went on R&R and I don't know from whom and that he got permission, but

35:30 he bought home an ancient Japanese, I don't know whether it was flintlock or matchlock, but it was confirmed well over a hundred years old and it was a beautiful thing. I saw photos of him in later years and he was in the Vintage Weapons Club or something in NSW and he was using that then, and it was a magnificent piece of work. I don't know how much he paid for it but

36:00 he was the only one that brought home anything of significant size or value that I know of. Most of us sent it home by mail and it was all this lacquer wear for females. Kimono, the Japanese kimono because they made it for the market, and I don't know if any of these were ever worn or anything. They may have been; I don't know. The other thing, a bloke outside at one of our R&R centres at Kure

36:30 House, and there was a chap there used to do this painting on silk – lions, tigers, peacocks and all that stuff – and they were generally long and narrow and you could stand and watch him paint on silk. He used to do the odd portrait. You would stand there and come back in three or four days and he would have painted your portrait on silk.

37:00 And to watch him work, some brushes might look to have one hair on them but that was the type of thing generally junk stuff you could buy.

What about your time in Korea getting correspondence and sending correspondence?

That was fair enough, you got that. You had your own battalion post office run by a corporal, and the orderly rooms in each company would get

37:30 mail in by a certain time each day around to him, and he was one of those who would go back to brigade to a bigger post office and take the mail, collect the battalion mail. Your mail was pretty fair in that respect.

How was mail call received by the blokes?

That was just given to your platoon sergeant and he would give it to wherever you were, and the corporal would just give you your mail. Not like the Yanks in the movies or anything like that,

38:00 no, if there was a letter for you. One of the things you don't do in the front line is congregate. And they just get mail to you. It is handed even in the worst instance if you were out on patrol it was held for you and you got it when you came in because you are always under the command of a corporal or a sergeant or something like that and mail distribution was never a problem in that regard.

Did you get care parcels from the Red Cross or anything like that?

I think,

38:30 the only time we got it from the ACF, the Australian Comforts Fund. I got a parcel from a family in Eastwood I think it was, and I wrote to them for all the time I was in Korea. I never wrote after I came back. I think I got one.

39:00 From what I gather they donated so much money and that amount of stuff was put in the parcel and I think that was it and I think I only got one of those.

Tape 6

00:33 **If you could tell me a little bit about what you think the differences are between your time in Korea and the men that were there before you?**

Ours was static warfare; theirs was mobile warfare. They entered through South Korea and they fought their way right up to the Yalu River and they fought their way back again, and then they fought

01:00 their way north again so that covered a lot of territory. Blokes like me got in and went into one spot and there you stayed, and you had trench warfare and you lived underground like a mole, winter and summer, and you went down to the valley to do whatever you had to do. So therefore it was mobile versus static warfare and ours was a static warfare.

01:30 **What were your thoughts of the Chinese and their ability?**

Very good, he was very good. He was dedicated. But from the little I had to do with it he was no room for individuality or anything like that. I don't know whether they had a class system as such but they

02:00 didn't seem to have any ability to think for themselves. They just did what they were told, when they were told and where they were told. Whereas our blokes seemed to, I can't think of the word, but they used to act on their own bit. That's about the only intimacy because I never really got close enough to have a conversation.

Australians have a bit of a reputation for that, don't they?

Yes, we are free thinkers. We are

02:30 used to thinking out what we are going to do, and even when we are given a job we are quite often left to how we are going to do it. I don't think these other people are. I don't know whether it comes from the egalitarian way of life or not.

Can you describe the different types of patrol?

03:00 Basically there are two. The fighting and the reconnaissance. The reconnaissance you are out there to get information. Now that can be as regards to topography, it can be regards to weapons, it can be regards to personnel, and what you need to do in order to get that defines the type of actual

03:30 patrol you will conduct. You may sneak up and just look, you may be prepared to fight to get information then it is a combination or reconnaissance come fighting patrol. So it depends on the task at hand. And you may even be out just to find minefields, you may be able just to find river crossings or something like that. You

04:00 may be able to look for observation points so you can do other things for radio communication or anything like that. And normally those type of patrols are small, well armed and conducted in a lot of secrecy. Fighting patrols are just what it says, you are out there looking for a fight. Maybe to prove your dominance, maybe in the hope of getting a number of prisoners

04:30 or something of some such nature but basically they are it.

How long were the patrols, generally?

It all depends again, as I've described, a lay-up patrol twenty-four hours. Fighting patrol maybe by the time it takes you to get out and what you are going to do, maybe anything from an hour and a half hour or two hours – it depends on what you are going to do. But

05:00 fighting patrol may even have to wander up and down the valley all night and still not get a fighting patrol. It might not even get a fight, rather, but the reconnaissance takes you as long as necessary to get what you want and get back with that information or whatever it is. You really can't say it has a definite length.

What did you think of the Korean landscape?

I have always said,

05:30 anyone said I was going back there I would slash my wrist. Lots of blokes have gone back. It is changed. The great adage in the battalion used to be, "There are only two directions in Korea, that is up and down." Until you get down the south where we were not, it is just low mountain hills. The biggest hill in our area was known as Little Gibraltar and it was 355 metres, commonly known

06:00 as Hill 355, and that was the major hill around. Everything was significantly less than 917, 183. And you always referred to a hill by its height. That is the height they were. But normally just narrow valleys with disused paddy fields and paddy buns in the bottom, and of course

06:30 the steep hillsides going up to these minor peaks and then on and that is all. The Japanese raped the country in their time there – they were there for twenty years or more. There were no trees or what was there was only very stunted pine trees with all manner of vines growing in amongst that. There was no trees and there is virtually no shade or anything like that. And the

07:00 arable land, even though disused, was all in the bottom of the valleys and that is where all the farming took place and all the little villages were and that type of thing. I would have seen it at its worst because it had been ravaged by Japanese occupation and then the war, the mobile war, and where it finished where it roughly followed the 38th parallel where it started, it

07:30 was all in these hills. It is really trying to think, well they are not as rugged as the Blue Mountains, they are not as steep, generally, and you could walk up them, generally. I don't recall anyone who really liked the Korean landscape.

Did you see any Koreans in Japan?

Not that I know of – none in uniform, for sure.

08:00 Let's face it, it is like trying to tell a Japanese from a Chinese. One wouldn't know. They could have been there. I believe there are a lot of Koreans in Japan but you would never know it just to look at them. You would have to be one of the race, I think. I never saw any in any Korean uniform at all.

Did you have much contact with the South Koreans?

The people, no,

08:30 because they had a stay-back line that we weren't allowed to cross and nor were they. As I mentioned before, they had the KATCOMs and these were Koreans attached to the Commonwealth Division to which we belonged. And there was the porters, I can't think of their name now but they did a lot of the portage.

09:00 They weren't fighting troops, they were like a labour mob and they used to carry everything everywhere. The KATCOMs used to live with us, eat with us and all that just like another soldier, but they never wore a slouch hat, they wore a beret instead of a slouch hat, but other than that they did everything we did. There was some good little fellows amongst them, the same as everyone else, and I used to get on all right with them.

There was a

09:30 **level of trust there?**

They couldn't do much because they were in this isolation, the same as we were. They could neither get in nor get out. There were people known to all and sundry as the slicky slicky boys and these were generally male. I never saw or heard of a female, who used to get in the rear areas and steal

10:00 and they would kill to get what they wanted. They were few and far. Every now and again they used to conduct a turkey hunt as they called it, and they would put out a long line of troops and that type of thing and you would just beat the scrub and try and find these people and get rid of them and hand them over to the Korean authorities. They would be measured in the tens and hundreds rather than the

10:30 thousands, but those I ever saw was only in the distance and that was two or three and I never ever spoke to one.

Earlier you were talking about some of the things you were doing in the trenches to make it more comfortable. What kind of devices did you hook up for heating?

As I explained, the old choofer, which was

11:00 a jerry can with the side cut out full of dirt and we would soak it in petrol. There was no other stuff, there was no firewood. It had to be and we didn't use diesel very much, very little, it was all petrol so you burnt petrol in dirt or sand, whichever you could get, and finished up with a choofer neck or a choofer face.

Would you be able to tell if people spend

11:30 **with a long time in the bunkers?**

Yes, because some of them wouldn't wash and around here they would just do that and when they took it back they would be black as anything, and hair would grow and that. When the petrol got down a bit and the flames weren't small that black smoke that comes off the petrol was all over their face and that type of thing. Their hands were dirty and gritty. You had to get down near the streams

12:00 or something like that to get water, or water was brought up to you, and whenever you could be released they used to have showers down further. And these were heated tents and they had pumps going and you used to be able to get a shower and that type of stuff. But other than being able to be excused out of the company lines and walk possibly half a mile

12:30 or a little more there was no showering or anything up there. The only water you had was what you had in your water bottle or something you could get to drink.

Did men find it a bit of a pain having to shave?

I suppose so, I don't know. It was all part of the morale boost. If you had troops in those circumstances and you stopped them,

13:00 you don't police their washing and their shaving and their general personal hygiene they tend to go downhill. If you let them live in less than the best conditions you can provide they tend to get lax, and that is where things like disease and illness and all that comes in. You have got to keep people clean and shaving you know you have got to do it, and if you don't it someone will jump on you so it becomes

13:30 a matter of course. And we used to have to shave every day and you had to clean your boots every day no matter what. If there was enough water and you were in a certain, we, the Australians by that time had developed the, it came out in World War II and is the mud gaiter to wear as opposed prior to that was called the anklets web. When they got this mud gaiter

14:00 it came up to here and it had two straps across and one underneath the boot. 2 Battalion, they blackened theirs, 1 Battalion Blancoed theirs and 3 Battalion put them in petrol and soaked them and got all the grease out and made them white from the occupation, so you had the three battalions with the three manners of wearing gaiters. We used to have to scrub our gaiters and keep them clean and things like that.

14:30 2 Battalion used to have to polish theirs with boot polish, and we all went to black gaiters before they did away with them, and then 1 Battalion had to give up their Blanco and go black as well. But the NCOs and officers work all the time at keeping morale up and making you do things so you get your mind off yourself.

If you wanted to with shaving,

15:00 **could you do a bit of a short cut and just shave particular areas and it would look like you had done it?**

When you have your smock hood done up you could, but if it slipped a bit along they would jump on you straight away and make you have a shave. They say shave and it meant a full shave, and if the hair was getting a bit long well someone would produce some implement of cutting

15:30 from somewhere and you would have your hair shortened. I have seen hair cut with hair clippers, scissors and I have even seen the medical orderly going crook because someone had knocked his scissors off and was cutting hair with them. Whatever means is at your disposal, because long hair breeds lice and it allows the dirt to get in.

16:00 You can get an itchy scalp and all that. And we were plagued up there as most trench war participants are with rats, and if you don't live cleanly and all that the longer the hair the easiest place for lice and things like that to find, so you try and keep the hair short from that point of view.

How did you keep the rats away at night?

16:30 You have mosquito nets and things like that, and because Korea was malarial, there was quite a bit of malaria up there, you gather your net in all the way round and you would kill the rat whenever you see it and get rid of it. They provided rat traps to some of them. Blokes manufactured their own types of traps to get rid of them.

17:00 I believe the French Canadians had more trouble because they seemed to eat out of ration packs and they would throw all the tins all around and leave residues of food around, and I believe they got much more trouble with rats than we did. If you found a rat the word went out, "There is a rat in Syd's hootchie and he got away," so everyone would be looking for the rat and someone would eventually

17:30 get him or get a rat. But rats were very heavily frowned upon.

Did they ever bite?

They get away from you if they can, but one of the big fears up there was with the rats they used to carry a lice of a particular kind and

18:00 if it brushed up against your clothing or your mosquito net or things like that you could get this lice on you, and if it bit you and the upshot of it all was a disease called haemorrhagic fever whereupon in the final analysis you virtually bleed to death through the pores of your skin. At that time there was no known cure so everyone was

18:30 particularly savage on rats – you did everything you could to get rid of a rat. I never heard of anyone being bitten by a rat but I think that would be less a problem than getting this mite. And we used to carry an anti-miting program there and subsequently in Malay against diseases like that where all the seams of your clothes

19:00 were covered. It is a light oily substance, an anti-mite thing, and they can get through the seam of the sewn seam of the clothing and get on you, so we used to carry our anti mite to prevent that. I have heard of blokes actually grab a rat and it has bitten him on the finger but that has been fixed up, and all that was far better than having the… But as for a rat attacking you

19:30 I haven't heard of that. Out in the valley at times when Charlie lost somebody… And they never got the bodies back. If you knew one was there you would get it underground because the rats would come. And the fact that big fat rats breeding meant more chance of haemorrhagic fever, but there wasn't very much of that at all. I believe we did lose a couple of fellows over the time with it but

20:00 I couldn't give you a figure of any or if we did, that is only soldiers' hearsay.

You mentioned there was malaria. Were they giving you quinine or…?

No we were on a thing called Paludrine. During the Second World War they used to use Atebrin, which turned everyone yellow, and the next thing was Atebrin and at the end of your time they gave you, I think it was

20:30 a week on another drug, the Paludrine doesn't stop it, it suppresses it. And they gave us this other drug, I can't think what it is, which supposedly killed the malaria. But Paludrine was something you take every day so long before you went into Korea and so long after you came out, even though you had this other drug as well.

21:00 A few blokes came home with malaria.

You mentioned earlier the lights from the jeeps were sought after, what about the actual jeep itself?

In our own area there wasn't much but there was one bloke who was later in a controversy in Vietnam who in fact sold the transport officer's jeep.

21:30 He was given twenty-four hours to get it back so there was a little bit of skullduggery in various ways went on here and there, but we got most of… See the Americans seemed to write off everything other than capital equipment in San Francisco before it hit the country, same in Vietnam, and so

22:00 if a jeep went, that was it. It was already written off. And unless someone particularly wanted it they didn't care too much, so consequently there was the American Tommy [Thompson] guns as opposed to our Owen gun, the American Garand rifle as opposed to our .303, the American carbines 45s, clothing of varying kind and boots of varying kind all traded with

22:30 reckless abandonment. For a slouch hat you could almost get half the United States. They loved the slouch hats. You wouldn't knock off a jeep but you would most probably knock off the headlights because in our situation you had nowhere to use a jeep. If a Yank came out and found the headlights gone he would trade it in and get another one from somewhere. It was just

23:00 they give it to sell it to a Korean if you could get back there and that, but then the provos would see the Korean drive the jeep and would want to know where he got it from. There was sort of… Location inhibited a lot of other activities that would have taken place.

Were the Australians particularly good at scrounging around for stuff?

Yes, we are famous for it, we are famous. We can get blood out of a stone in many cases, yeah, we are good at it.

23:30 **In cases of your slouch hat, how difficult was it to go and get reissued with another one?**

You just, see price is a thing, if they say it's not fair wear and tear or, "This is the third one you have lost this week. You will have to pay for it." In those days, I can't remember, but I would say about 25 shilling was a hat, well you might get $150 American dollars out of a Yank

24:00 for that so it is worth selling, isn't it? The profit was enormous. Whilst we were in Korea we changed from the Rising Sun to the regimental badge and that made the price of the Rising Sun went up, so if you could get those it made the hat much more. And depending on what rank of Yank you sold it to and how badly he wanted it and your

24:30 bargaining skills, two hundred dollars American was fairly common.

Why did they love it so much?

It is unique in the world, it is and of course some of the blokes who were fortunate enough to get near a Korean village or something like that and stick a couple of feathers behind the badge, a little feather and that would be a kangaroo feather.

25:00 **A kangaroo feather?**

The Americans are really, very, very ignorant of geography outside their own country, and really many of the Americans in Korea, and if their Dad hadn't been here or their elder brother been here during the Second World War or something like that, they had no idea who or where or what Australia was.

25:30 A kangaroo feather. And show him a photo of a kangaroo or something and, "This is one of the rare feathers from it," the price of the hat went up. All those gimmicks went on like the Australians in the First World War. When Mum told me about they had goanna farms, kangaroo farms and emu farms, which have become a reality, but they had all these type of farms and we had them too.

26:00 We used to sign into the American clubs in and around Tokyo as Billy Cook, Bob Menzies and all those fellows used to be there. It is just part of the Australian larrikinism, I think, and it went on all the time.

Did you see a lot of that on the field out on patrols and things like that?

What?

See Australian larrikins?

You don't see it on the patrol, the patrol is a very serious business. But

26:30 in and around the leave centres and behind the lines in reserve it was on all the time. That is what Australians do. To us it is a normal way of life, but everyone else thinks we are mad.

Was there any singing? Did you hear any singing?

There was a few, but most of them can't be sung in polite society.

27:00 Actually I have often thought about that it was in conjunction with the Kiwis and it was the last war where people made up songs and ditties and things. I think the only song since like in Korea there was the 'Kiwi Cannonball' because they also had a transport platoon

27:30 and they used to call it the Cannonball Express and all that. Other than that the last song I heard written about a theatre and we joked and laughed. In Vietnam all that came out was 'God Help me I was Only 19', a totally different switch. We were a much, much happier mob, I reckon. They used to make up these songs about various

28:00 officers and things like that which can only be obliquely referred to in polite society, but they used to sing them with reckless abandon.

Can you remember them, Syd?

I am not saying – that is a no comment.

Some verses?

No, no, no, no. There was some good ones, there were some funny ones and there was some good yarns and that was all.

28:30 And we had one bloke for many years was reputed to be a relative of Banjo Patterson, but he since came out and said, "No, I was never a relative of Banjo Patterson." And he wrote a poem about the belt-fed 25-pounder. A 25-pounder is an artillery

29:00 piece and the 25 pound is the weight of the projectile that it fires, and its diameter is a little over three inches so it is quite a fair thing. I carried it for a long time and then I lost it. But this was the story of this bloke who… Charlie was in his bunker and we were in our bunker and this bloke… And we couldn't get at Charlie so they invented this belt-fed 25-pounder.

29:30 And in essence this belt contained three wooden shelves and an explosive shell, three wooden shelves and an explosive shell. You would line up on the bunker of Charlie's door and you would fire the four rounds, and the first three rounds would go knock, knock, knock and he would open the door and it would go that one. That was about twenty-five or thirty verses long and it was funny, really funny.

30:00 That was one I remember. And then there was another fellow, he on paper invented a gun, and if you

have seen photos of the Second World War, the anti-aircraft gun, which was a 3.7, had a firing pin of this big cannon and you had to be a general to pull the lanyard and I think you had to be a full colonel to help carry the ammunition. And anyway

30:30 he did all this to poetry, too, and it was very clever. But in the moves over the years I have lost them both. They were very good. But there was a lot of poetry on that and various experiences that the blokes would write a poem or song about or something like that. I think, and overall there were a few ditties and yarns going round but they don't seem to have done it since the Korean War. I don't know why. I think it was mainly because we were so

31:00 influenced by the Second World War and the Second World War diggers with us might have had a bit to do with it.

Is there anything you haven't covered from Korea?

No, I think we have covered most of it. That is about all there was. The intense cold lives with people, the cold, the heat. The heat was, my hottest day I think it was

31:30 117 on the old scale. I remember a couple of us going once past a disused paddy field and it had grown up and it looked like reeds in it and one of the blokes threw the rock in and a black solid cloud rose like that and that was mosquitoes, just like that. I think that is the most significant thing,

32:00 the summer, the amount of mosquitoes in these disused paddy fields. We have been through Korea fairly well I think. I don't think there is a great deal worth remembering. Just before I got there, there was the parade of 3 Battalion, 2 Battalion relieving 1, and that was the only time

32:30 in the history of the Royal Australian Regiment where the three battalions were on parade together, and that happened just before I got there. Something one would have liked to be there but that was the only main significant thing that went on.

Did you have a camera with you?

I would be the world's worst photographer.

33:00 I made a bit of attempt in taking but they are only little black and white things. In the infantry carrying a camera is one thing, keeping it undamaged is another, and very few cameras are made that won't reflect light somehow off the shiny metal or the lens or anything.

33:30 And unauthorised photography or note taking has always been frowned upon. Blokes keep war diaries but it is highly illegal and blokes do it, admittedly, I know, but I was never that way inclined. A few shots and I bought a camera in Japan and took it, but I think I lost it in six months somewhere along the way.

34:00 I was never a great photographer.

How far in advance would you know when your departure date would be when your time was up?

You know the date you are due and it comes along and comes around, and you attempt to get to the diggers into the canteen and have a few beers, you know, when it is coming. And unless anything untoward comes

34:30 you know that you are going to move on a certain date. They will say, "You are leaving," so you leave and come home and that was about it.

So how did you get home?

I was fortunate that I did two extra months, a bit over four extra months, and came home on the New Australia. The battalion came home. Had ten days luxury on the New Australia

35:00 being waiters to make our bed and bring us food at the table and all that type of thing. We marched through Brisbane, marched through Sydney.

Did you march through and was there some sort of parade?

A big, see the Royal Australian or the, what became the Royal Australian Regiment

35:30 formed on Morotai at the end of the Second World War, and it was originally the 65th, 66th and 67th Australian Infantry Battalions. They went to Japan and then they changed it to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Australian Regiment. And in 1949 Her Majesty gave us 'Royal', so it became 1, 2 and 3 Battalions,

36:00 the Royal Australian Regiment. 2 Battalion came home first and then 1 Battalion and then 3 Battalion was preparing to come home when the Korean War broke out. So 3 Battalion as a battalion had never been in Australia, and we brought it home as the battalion, we brought it home. It was a big event militarily that the battalion had come home for the first time.

36:30 Everyone marched through Brisbane and then everyone marched through Sydney and they put the Queenslanders on a train and took them back to Brisbane, and then the other states just peeled off. The poor old West Australians had to march through everything but the Queenslanders and New South

Welshmen only went through Sydney and Brisbane.

What was the reception like?

Magnificent.

37:00 We had a big reception, all the toffs were there and we were very well feted and that was about it. Then we were all sent on leave, all that was done on the boat, and when we finished the march in our own various companies we went to a table and handed in our rifle and bayonet and picked up your gear and you went on leave.

37:30 We were able to go down the wharves next day and we had been issued with a metal soldier's box and we were allowed to go down there and pick it up the next day, and then we were on leave for whatever amount of days we had. I think I had been away, I had something like eighty-four, eighty-five days' leave or something like that, so I just knocked around Sydney

38:00 and visited relatives and did all that kind of thing.

Was it a long time to have on your hands?

You can fill it in quite easily by the time you go and stay with this brother or sister or this friend or that friend or visit a mate and all that. I had a sister in Brisbane at that time and another brother in Rylstone and a sister in Bondi still. I had

38:30 friends from the first time when I went down to Balcombe in Melbourne so I went down there and I had plenty of time to do everything.

Did you have many conversations during that time about your time in Korea?

Yeah, much like you do now, "What was it like?" But no one ever understands really. From what I have told you, you can not experience the

39:00 intense cold, you can't experience the fear, the relief. You are in a different world as a soldier. I think that is why you lose so many friends because you no longer understand people and they no longer understand you. The train of though is totally different. Everyone said, "Glad to see you home,"

39:30 and, "What was it like?" "It was all right."

Did you have a transition when you came back?

You have always got someone to meet up who knows, who was there, someone there before you and someone there with you or that, so there is always your mates and all that type of thing.

Did you feel that you have really grown up in that time?

Yes, yes, no longer the silly young boy

40:00 that went away. You mature fairly quickly, I would say. I think there is a significant, and people remarked on the difference when you come back because you see things that you never see in a civilian context. It is all totally different.

Tape 7

00:33 **Do you think people were really well informed of about what happened in Korea when you came back?**

It has become known as the Forgotten War. We accepted our lot, whatever it was, and we never ever made a great thing of it – you have been and you came and

01:00 you just got on with your soldiering and your living and that. It seemed to die a very quick death, like the Vietnam War people are still fighting that, but the Korean War was never ever looked at in that way. And most people, I won't say most, a lot of people don't even know it was on.

01:30 A lot of people don't know that Australians were there or anything like that. It just seemed to die a very quick natural death because by the time we finished our, Australia finished its involvement in Korea in 1956 they were already re-engaged in Malaya, so that took off a little bit.

02:00 Malaya was a darn sight more comfortable to photograph and all that than Korea was because Malaya had a much more comfortable climate and that, and even from what I gather right up to the end in Korea they were out in isolation away from the population and that nobody who had any inkling or pre-disposal wanted to go there because

02:30 it wasn't a nice place to go.

Do you mean like journalists wouldn't cover it because it wasn't a very nice environment?

Yes, that is right. They would rather be sitting in Malaya drinking stingers and in nice British clubs like the Noel Coward and who is that bloke wrote, all these people, Raffles Hotel and all that, as to be in some dirty dingy little

03:00 being bitten to death by mosquitoes. They didn't want to know. There was nothing much going on, really.

While we are on the topic of journos [journalists], you would have seen them a lot, particularly in Vietnam, but it sounds like you saw them in Malaya as well. What is your opinion about them in general?

03:30 You want me to remain a gentleman, don't you? It is like everything else, some are good and some are not so good. Some are a downright nuisance, some know the score and do the job very well. It all depends on what you are doing and time and circumstance like governs a soldier and also governs a journalist. Really it is a case of live and

04:00 let live, really. In Korea too we had, mainly we used to have army photographers used to get sent over from Japan, "It is time there was a picture in one of the papers. Go and get a picture of Bill Smith," or somebody. Or someone's mother would make a noise to the local Member [of Parliament], "I haven't seen young Willy since he went over there," so they would go and get a photo of young Willy

04:30 and put it in the paper or something like that. As I say, in my time it was very static and not a lot of photos were being taken. It is not like when it was mobile and dramatic things were happening all the time on large scale. My time was very humdrum and I would say that would have a bit to do with it as well.

When you did come back and you were on leave and you were talking to people about

05:00 **what you had been through, did you get frustrated that they didn't really know or weren't interested?**

You don't normally talk to people or that. They say, "Where have you been?" My sister's husband, I used to meet him after work and we used to go, and in those days the 6 o'clock swill was on in Sydney, hotels closed at 6 o'clock so the people knocking off work who felt like a beer used to have to fight to get

05:30 a beer at night-time on their way home from work or something like that. I used to meet the brother-in-law and they'd say, "Who is the young bloke, Bill?" And he'd say, "Young Syd. Just home from Korea." "How was it Syd?" "Not bad." "Oh okay." And that was it. You never got on your soapbox and said, "This was dreadful or that was dreadful," or anything like that because we were still mixing it with the Second World War fellows and they had seen a damn sight more

06:00 on a damn larger scale than we had, although Korea pound for pound, man for man, still had the highest casualties since the First World War on a man for man basis. It was higher than in the Second World War on numbers committed.

That is something you certainly don't hear.

06:30 We lost three hundred-odd there but for the first twelve months we only had one battalion committed, and then after that we had two battalions committed but that was it. It was still very heavy causalities.

So you had eighty days?

Yeah, it was something like that.

Did you have

07:00 **a girlfriend at that stage?**

No.

There wasn't anyone? You were called back up, what happened after that?

Your leave finished and you appeared back at the appointed time and you took up duties. I found out, it was very good too, that I had been promoted to

07:30 corporal for some number of months and didn't know it so I walked into a fair amount of back pay, which made me feel pretty good. It is a sad thing in a way that when we got back, to digress, a battalion has a headquarters, four rifle companies or four fighting companies

08:00 and a support company, and in those days a headquarters company. When we got back for any number of reasons people had been posted away and we had a headquarters, a headquarters company which was very under-strengthened, which contained in those days the cooks, the administrative people and the signallers, and

08:30 I was still trying to get out of signals and I went to A Company as a corporal, found out I had been promoted so I went there as a corporal, and two of my mates were the first two members of 1 Section of A Company. That was all we had. The battalion had gone, just diminished and gone overnight. I lasted in

09:00 I think ten days and the signals people found out where I was and back to signals, so I went back into signals as a corporal but we had no-one there at all. The cooks do their cooking because that is what they do and those of us had to be fed. Transport was,

09:30 that was also headquarters, that was very under-staffed and under-manned and under-resourced with vehicles and that and we had nothing. All that expertise and that was gone, so it was for a while, a short while it was like a transit camp; you had people coming and going. I think I had,

10:00 the two sergeants I had because there were two sergeants in signals, one for administration and one for the line, and they both went. And I think my worst time I had four different officers in a week. It was just everyone was in much the same boat, people coming and going until eventually the battalion overseas gets sorted

10:30 out and people coming in and all that and returning from leave and it gets sorted out and then you get some semblance of the battalion back. When we got back we were down to that, not even a rifle company. There was one corporal. We didn't a have an OC of the company and we never had a single officer, a sergeant major or anything. A corporal and then myself

11:00 in the orderly room and myself and two diggers, and we opened up A Company. That prevailed I think about ten days before I got dragged back into signals. One of the sergeants got me back because he was going on leave and he looked like he might stay if he hadn't found me, the rat. It was just then a time

11:30 that people came in and stayed and the battalion grew again. We had a major administering for awhile and then we got a commanding officer. So the battalion just by normal processes grew back into a battalion again over time. You couldn't do any training in the initial stages. One, we had no equipment, and two, we had very few people. I

12:00 think when I went back to signals there was myself and six others out of a post of nominal strength of a bit over two officers and fifty or fifty-five or something like that, so in order to keep the soldiers busy we used to play volleyball and the signals would play anybody they could volleyball. We tried to teach others.

12:30 If we had a new bloke we would try to teach them voice procedure or something like that, and I think the first influx of stores I got one telephone and two radios so we were able to do a bit of voice procedure over the two radios. Oh that's right, I got half a dozen rolls of cable so I used to roll cable out and roll cable up and cut cable

13:00 and repair cable and anything to start giving the fellows something to do. It wasn't long, we weren't there all that long and we had a few blokes in the battalion overall and the floods hit Newcastle, the Hunter River flooded. It went on and

13:30 then they, people from all over Australia sent fodder for the cattle and things like that to Newcastle and then the problem was what do we do with it, and someone came up with the idea and 3 Battalion were the only soldiers, regular soldiers of any strength in NSW so they sent us up to Newcastle

14:00 and we spent about a month or something up there unloading the fodder off the railway trucks onto road trucks and helping to distribute that. And some of it we took and took it out to Williamtown and where cattle were flood bound on high ground they dropped fodder to them there. Some of the blokes got rides round the Hunter

14:30 Valley on the trucks, one or two got rides in the aeroplane and we were there for about a month doing that. We got more publicity out of that than we did out damn near the whole Korean War because we were in people's eye. And the floods, those floods were pretty devastating. I got one trip to Maitland and

15:00 there was a double-storey brick building and there was a bloke doing something up the top and we said, "What the hell is he doing?" And he was fixing a flood marker to the top of this double-storey building, and when his handiwork was finished it was a board about that wide and a big chalk mark and his building, whatever it was, had been completely submerged in the flood.

15:30 There was a lot of mud around and a lot of dead cattle around and debris all over the place when we went through, and there was just a couple of wheel tracks through the mud on the silt on the road. But it was still very much inundated with mud and debris when I went through. A few pockets of water but very little. Some of the fellows got out and there was water still flowing well in places. So that was a month of fairly solid work.

16:00 I can't remember the figures but we shifted many thousand of tons of baled hay, bagged grain and all that type of stuff.

How long did you have before things started heating up and you had to take off again?

It was a four-year cycle, a bit over three years, that's right. We hung around Newcastle,

16:30 New South Wales, there. We did the floods, we did exercises with the navy and air force down around in the back of Jervis Bay. The fly boys used to do what they call the escape and evasion things. Put them in a truck and take them out where they can't see where they are going and they gave them their emergency rations that they fly with, which

17:00 generally is a few bars of chocolate, the maps that they would normally carry on this particular sortie when they were shot down, and then they would drop them. We were the enemy troops and they had to get back through us to safety. And they had a parachute with them and in flying clothes. They were rather hilarious because the poor cows knew nothing about the bush or how to live in the bush

17:30 and most of them, we used to get our little ambush positions and you'd hear, "Hey, where the bloody hell are you? For God's sake show yourself. I've had it. Come and get me, for God's sake." So you would stand up and they'd say, "Thank God for that." They'd had it by the time we got them. And we did a couple of those and they were rather funny.

18:00 We had built up and we did the Tattoos, they used to do Tattoos and the Sydney Show and they gave us a new uniform, the most stupid thing ever. It was deep navy with a red stripe down the side,

18:30 buttoned-down collar with badges here, white collar with a black tie and the cap was this deep navy with a red band around here. We had a stall, we were opening the showground and I went to my sister's place and got all dressed to go to do this and I went to have a beer and this woman wanted to throw me out of the pub because she

19:00 reckoned I was a non-conforming Salvation Army bloke and I shouldn't be drinking in uniform. And there was a lot of things like that – people wouldn't believe we were in the army. They used the trousers for mess duties for some years but the uniform didn't last all that long. It was thoroughly impractical in the extreme.

What was the reasoning behind that?

That is a good question. No-one ever knew. It was a stupid uniform.

19:30 For soldiers to try and maintain such a uniform was beyond the pale in the first instance, and then you would get a young bloke who he had joined up so they would give him his uniform and the trousers were a good length. Well then a bit of army training and his muscles would, his trousers are that far above his boots. It was ridiculous but however that was it. At the show we used to

20:00 try and get people in the army. They used to have a stall where we used to demonstrate various facets. We would have a mortar and a machine gun set and nothing around so the kids could play on it, and we would have a couple of weapons chained to the table and a couple of radios and brochures and hand them out and tell them, "Don't worry madam, your son will be safe with us," and all this type of thing.

20:30 We had the Tattoos and there were a couple of recruiting marches through Sydney. At that time National Service had started. This was the original where they used to come in and do I think seventy-seven days and they were at Holsworthy. As each intake finished you would have to go to Holsworthy over a weekend

21:00 and we would put on a static display where we would build a proposed company position out of sandbags and have the mortars and all that in it, and then Billy would bring Mum and Dad through it and see how brave these soldiers were and what they did. And then the next day they would all be sat on a ridge here and a company attack would go in up here and they would be able to watch it all, how these soldiers fight their wars and things like that.

21:30 Well they were absolutely hilarious with all the little asides that used to go on, and we did those. Once we never had enough blokes to man this anti-tank gun that I spoke of before, the 17-pounder. It fires a projectile very high velocity, 17 pound, and it would penetrate most tanks of the day. For that we had a target, we had

22:00 three and two 44-gallon drums filled with oil and water and a small detonator in it so that when it was struck the jar would set the detonator off and the whole thing would flame in a big cloud of black smoke. The only bloke who knew anything about the 17-pounder of any consequence was the sergeant in charge and the number 1 on the gun,

22:30 and he must have had a bad day because I was number 4 and I had to carry the round up. Anyway he let this thing go and instead of hitting the drum it hit the ground alongside of it and in the distance and away it went, and in about five or ten minutes a phone call came through, "Cease fire." "What has gone wrong?" It landed in the main street

23:00 of Engadine and people were not amused. There were a couple of little… Once we were at the static display and for the opening of the static display of the National Servicemen the CO or commandant of Liverpool Area was to make his speech and welcome Mum and Dad and all that there,

23:30 and he is driving out to get his salute and take the parade and a National Serviceman who was the best dressed on the guard of the day used to be known as the stickman, the stick orderly and he used to follow the CO like a puppy dog wherever he went. They are waiting for this bloke to arrive

24:00 and lo and behold he doesn't arrive. If you are familiar with that area it is pretty much bushland with a sealed road through it and it goes back many years. Anyway he didn't arrive so the CO in charge of the parade waiting for the dignitary to arrive sent a signal, "Any sight of him?" And the guard on the gate sent back a note, "No there isn't." So this happened a few times and everyone was

24:30 agitated because officers are not used to standing out there like the diggers are, and eventually this, I am not sure what his rank was, whether he was a brigadier or major general or what, and he arrived at the gate and he wound the window down and said, "Brigadier so and so," and this digger looked into him and said, "Boy, are you in the shit. The colonel has been looking for you for the past half hour," and it apparently brought the house down.

25:00 There was things like that. And they were going to put a parachute drop one day and this bloke jumped out of the parachute and landed in the highest tree, so that didn't go down well. And then they had the navy with the old Fireflies. They were going to support us and they got their run in wrong and instead of coming in over the troops and doing that, they came in over the right and in over the crowd and he let go with all these

25:30 50 mm cannon shells and all the brass fell amongst the officers and that brought them on no end. There were a few funnies like that going on.

That was very successful PR [Public Relations] work.

It filled in our time, and we used to laugh about it. In addition to that they did the Tattoos. They were good and I don't really understand why the army stopped them really.

26:00 They reckon they were too expensive to run but they used to pack the Sydney Showground, really pack it. The thing I always remember about that which I thought funny, a lot of people didn't agree, was that at start time the whole thing would black out, and like in the blitz in London in the black Big Ben would chime and

26:30 I think it was 8 o'clock, and then around the Showground they had, I don't know how many, but a number of these 3.7 anti-aircraft guns and they would all fire a blank or two and for a couple of seconds it would be dead quiet and then you would hear all the babies, "Wah," in the Showground and then everyone would laugh and then on would come the lights and the

27:00 show would start. But to hear that bang, silence and all the little kids frightened out of their wits. And we used to think that was funny but that was our warped sense of humour. That used to, I reckon we put on a better show than the Edinburgh Tattoo because we had more room and it was much more varied. We used to put on tabloids of all kinds. I have been a communist soldier

27:30 at the battle of Kap'yong. I have been a Zulu, and what was the other one?

I didn't know there was acting in the army.

Oh we were champions at it, but we used to do that and of course tons and tons of bands. The forerunners of the SAS [Special Air Service], the CMF commando units, used to do the rope works,

28:00 going down ropes and things like that. The navy and all that used to do things with their old type naval cannons and it was really good stuff, and I really can't understand why because as soldiers you are paid no matter what you are doing and they should have got enough revenue out of the attendance to pay for the thing, and it was magnificent PR for the army,

28:30 all services. I don't know. But we did the Tattoos there and we were next up then also to go to Malaya.

How did that all happen?

We knew we were next to go so we were up to strength in less one company, and training was carried on at platoon and company levels and all that and

29:00 we were told we would have to go through Canungra. At that time Canungra was the carryover from the wartime jungle training centre, and we went through there a company at a time. By this time I was a sergeant.

Still with signals?

Yes. They sent me, they formed a cadre to go through

29:30 Canungra as a trainee and come out knowing, and thereby you would assist the permanent staff in instructing the battalions and companies as they came through, so that was the first time I went through Canungra. Each company went through in its turn, and out of the whole deal through

30:00 mishaps of various persons I finished going through Canungra five times, which didn't please me. But however that was part of it.

You were very well trained?

I was very, very fit too, I'll tell you.

How was the training there?

Very physically demanding, very physically demanding. It was and a lot of the stuff we didn't agree with and we didn't employ it in operations.

30:30 **What do you mean? What stuff didn't you agree with?**

It is like it is an old trick and you even see it on Hopalong Cassidy – one bloke fires a shot and runs away and we chase him and run into an ambush. This was something they were teaching you up there and that was one of the things and we said, "We are not chasing him." "Why not?" "Well you will run into an ambush." "How do you know there is not one there?" "Well how do you know it is not?" We used to do,

31:00 we had a lot of arguments over things like that. They used to have, we objected to it but it didn't do any good. We had a muscle toughening, not a muscle, the confidence course which I suppose was four hundred yards or five hundred yards long and it used to start off and go through different obstacles, and one of them was known as the bear pit

31:30 and it was a revetted with logs, and in the centre there was a log went across to keep the walls back and it was full of water. This bloke who was in charge of it, he made that his thing, and when he was driving around Canungra and all places like that he used to pick up road kill and all that and throw it in the pool. We had one officer who was one of the fittest blokes,

32:00 he used to climb a six-foot wall and then go down and under this thing, you had to go under and out the other side. This officer thought he would do the right thing so he jumped off the wall and hit the centre and away and he made him come back and go underneath it. He started it and we objected to it, water is one thing but muddy water is not so good, but this idiot putting all this road kill in it and things like that to make it more obnoxious was beyond the pale.

32:30 We got accused of being a bunch of softies and all this stuff. In that course culminated at the Coomera River where there was a bloke took your rifle from you and you climbed a thirty-foot tower and jumped into the river. In the middle of July the Coomera River is bloody cold but that was part of the deal, we accepted that.

33:00 We did that say Monday, Tuesday you did muscle toughening, which was these manila ropes hung through the trees in various angles, sizes and that, and you had to go through all that hanging and swinging and pull yourself all to toughen the muscles. When you had finished either one of those you would change your clothes and then you would start training for the day.

33:30 And it was intensive and we used to train full five days a week. And in deference to the staff they would have the weekend off. We would most probably do a march down to Waterford or Beaudesert or something, do a march or something like that as part of Sunday and then have Saturday night and Sunday off. It was a month's course and we would do that.

34:00 **Were you retrained with what guns?**

The same weapons, the same weapons were still in vogue, but as it was Malaya we didn't use anti-tank so we did that and again we boarded the New Australia and we went to Malaya via, on the New Australia.

Did you have pre-embarkation leave again?

We had all that.

34:30 In Malaya those who were married took their families with them so we had men, women and children on the ship.

How long were you told you were going for?

Two years. That was a two-year posting and we knew it was coming. It a is thing you know and little snippets get confirmed and confirmed and then you get briefings and things like that.

35:00 We set off to do that and after we finished training in Canungra, or once we started training in Canungra, we were seldom if ever together again as a battalion until we got on the boat as we always had one training somewhere and a company training at something in NSW plus one in Queensland and then one doing garrison

35:30 duty at Ingleburn, so we were very well split up and kept very busy. Eventually though we got on the boat and we were supposed to leave, I believe, at something like 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning but there was an altercation of some sort with the wharf labourers and they wouldn't load our gear, so

36:00 there was much negotiation. We were on board and there was a lot of gear coming on from the families and stuff and there was much negotiation and apparently early in the afternoon they went back to work and got a day's interference money because someone had said something to them, but what was said I never found out. We got away about 4.30 in the afternoon, I believe. We were on our way and we got up around,

36:30 I am not quite sure how close, up around Thursday Island and we ran into a tanker and we spent a number of days anchored off Thursday Island while the army engineers on board shored up the bow and all that type of thing. I might add that the New Australia on coming out to do that trip had hit another ship and lost an anchor in the Thames, and

37:00 then with us on board it hit the Franz Stove, which was a tanker up off Thursday Island. Anyway we got up and offloaded in Penang. No we weren't, we were offloaded in Singapore and some people and the wives and that were taken to Penang and offloaded in Penang.

37:30 We went to a place called Kota Tinggi, which was a jungle warfare centre in Johor just over the causeway of Singapore. We had to do infantry training there in the new jungle tactics for anti-terrorist operations in Malaya. One of the companies did what they call their

38:00 nursery operation, this is one when nothing is supposed to happen, and they got this terrorist and it turned out to be the local ice cream man. And on our first operation we got a CT [Communist Terrorist]. They thought my signallers, because we hadn't had Morse training and they said we should have Morse training and jungle operations,

38:30 so we had two British Army pilots who used to take over one of the staterooms on the ship each day and try and teach us Morse between sort of Sydney and Singapore, and we were supposed to be learning. Well not a lot of it got through so we were trying to learn the Morse almost until we came home two years later because we had no training.

39:00 We were in Kota Tinggi, we were supposed to be there six weeks and the signallers were there three weeks and they packed us up and sent us up into the state of Kedah, south of the main town called Ipoh in a little village, outside a little village, and we were attached to a British unit called the Lincolnshire Regiment

39:30 and they were nearly finishing their tour. So I had to farm my signallers out and they went out with the Brits [British] and under supervision did all the radio operating and picking up on their Morse and doing things like that so we could get a bit of expertise. We had three weeks with them and we went up to our headquarters, which was at a place called

40:00 Kuala Kangsar and the old Sultan's old palace, which is called an Isetan, they had built this camp around this old Isetan that became the battalion headquarters and one rifle company, C Company, was there and the signallers were farmed out to the various companies. It was unlike any other conventional war

40:30 because there were tens of miles between us. Your area of operation was measured in tens of square miles rather than in tens of hundreds of yards. We had battalion headquarters and most of administration company and the main signal centre there and

41:00 Charlie Company. A Company was thirty to thirty miles away at a place called Lasah and I was stationed down near the tactical headquarters at a place called Sungei Siput with B Company.

Tape 8

00:33 **Can you tell us where you ended up when you got there?**

I was at B Company at Semiseeput with the tactical headquarters. Now support company of course less the signallers was based up on Penang and that was where all the families were. Kuala Kangsar was the closest to Penang and it was round figures one hundred miles between, and we were supposed to work for twelve days and have

01:00 two days off. That was the theory, in practice it never worked. The CO we had at the time, he was revered by the battalion and if he said, "Jump," well everyone just said, "How high?" He was a soldier's man and there was no doubt about him and he worked us and we used to go out. The thing was we used to go,

01:30 supposedly go out for this twelve days and come back that, well that theory didn't work and you used to go out by platoons from a base and then you most probably split up into sectors and go out and come back. Over the period of time sometimes you went out for a week and sometimes you went out for a fortnight and sometimes you went out for three weeks.

02:00 On certain shows you went out for longer and because of security the boss wouldn't use helicopters, because once you put a helicopter in everyone knows and everyone vacates.

What choppers were you using at that stage?

We had a silly little old Pommy stuff.

Westmore Scout?

No, no, well before that. What is the name of it? The Sycamore

02:30 and a bigger one. I forget, but they were the originals. There was a particular hill we went on once which was three and a half thousand feet high and the Sycamore from the base camp from way, way, down on the road could bring one box of rations up. Stupid, ridiculous things they were, but however that was it.

03:00 If you were going out they would give you fourteen days and you had to pack fourteen days' rations on your back, and then the next fourteen days shall we say another platoon would carry that unbroken on their back and you would walk in two platoons together. When you got to where you were going that platoon would come back and leave you with a pile of rations to do you. And you patrol around doing

03:30 one for fourteen days and then you would pick up the others and distribute it and move somewhere else and do that, so you most probably do a month in the bush. It was, until you got used to it, Malaya was a very physical war of operation because you were carrying this weight all the time. More often than not I think the numbers of contacts

04:00 you could number on two hands, but the work had to go in all the time. You would patrol looking for camps, resting places, chance encounters, anything you could to disrupt them and you spent more than half your life in ambushes, ambush, ambush all the time. That is the kind of war it was. And

04:30 the sigs we had these HF [High Frequency] radios which they have found out since our time was the worst kind of radio you can have for the tropics, hence that is why they use Morse. And no-one had the brains or the knowledge to say, "Use VHF [Very High Frequency] or UHF [Ultra High Frequency]. It is much better." And they thought because it was so hilly that the UHF and that was no good, and they never thought of putting blokes up there and

05:00 blokes up there, and that was the way we operated with that. So a lot hard walking, a lot of hard miles were done just doing this patrolling and things like that. One of our majors, who it is understood that the Japs had something like a brigade of troops chasing him in New Guinea, and he was a very

05:30 warfare knowledgeable little man. He wasn't a very big bloke and he said it was stupid spending all this energy out in the jungle all the time because people have got to be fed, so what we did was start ambushing the jungle edge. Then things started to really pay off and we are credited with doing the first ambushes that broke the big operation

06:00 and in turn broke the Malayan Emergency due to this ambushing there. It started off in dirty rubber and we got a couple out of that, and a couple we thought were wounded, it turned out one of them was and he was the leader and he had been severely wounded through the neck. Everywhere you went you had a white area and

06:30 a red area and a black area – anything in the black area was fair game. Anyway after this ambush one of our armoured little scout cars, they put turrets on them, saw this couple up there and they went and it turned out to be this bloke. Well he gave information so from there on we started to get more information and so it went on. That is basically what Malaya was all about,

07:00 just this patrolling, constant patrolling, constant ambushing. Not as many contacts as you would think because security was the biggest problem. The locals, it is like foreigners coming in here and chasing people – the local people will hide you and give you information about you. We couldn't move. We had a couple of instances

07:30 the blokes drinking in the bars and someone rolling a grenade in, setting fire to the place and taking potshots as they walked down the street, things like that. It was, security was the big problem all the way. We used to leave in the dead of night or go out this way and spend a couple of days working

08:00 our way back around this way, and as soon as anyone saw you that was the end of it. A big effort was put into trying to maintain security because you would hear… The rubber tappers used to go out before first light and if they saw you, you would hear them knocking on the trees, banging pans together, and you may as well go home and that is the way it was. We had other security things we would do.

08:30 We would assist the police, we would be on road blocks with the police checking the vehicles and the police would do searches and all that type of thing. We did one operation which I think the worst operation I did there. The Poms did it a few times, we did it the once only,

09:00 where a village was known to be supplying information to people in the bush and they were their own sons and brothers and that, so what they would do was take a decision, and we were in the north of Malaya, three quarters of the way up, and they would make a decision that village is going to be moved. So you would go and you would surround the village,

09:30 no-one in or out, the police would go in with security, that is us blokes, and you would say, "You have got so long to move. Pack everything you can carry with you. What you can't carry will stay behind." Whilst they are loading them onto trucks and all that they start knocking the village down. You are destroying a person's home, taking them away from their employment,

10:00 and we ride shotgun on them and we took them to where they were going to be and you put them into

these new villages, as they called them. Now that was a barbed wire fence, ploughed ground for about a chain then a barbed wire fence and then it was all lit in between with spotlights and then guard posts. Inside the village,

10:30 this site would have so much iron, so much atap, so much nails, so much wood, “There is your house, build it.” The hatred that was there I would never like to experience again. That would be the worst operation I have ever done.

11:00 Old ladies in their Chinese, because 90% of CTs were Chinese, a few Indians and just a venomous hatred was really palpable, it was really something. And then those people that were declared, whether they had been moved or not, if you were declared a black village you weren’t allowed… They used to have central cooking, they

11:30 set up their style of kitchen and all the rice they would be measured out and their unit of measurement was a kati, which I believe is about a pound and a third. They were allowed so many katis per person per day, so there would be so much rice cooked. With that there would be so much greens and so much protein, which would be normally fish and in the case of the Chinese some pork

12:00 or something like that. They weren’t allowed to hold food in their house at all. So they would do these raids every now and again and open all the cupboards and look for food and confiscate the food so that they maintained all that, and because that meant it stopped them taking, because food doesn’t last long when it is cooked, so that would stop them smuggling food out and things like that. We did that operation and we ambushed a few of these villages at different times

12:30 to try and get anyone coming in.

What were the upshot, what were the results of these sort of operations?

The idea was to separate these people from their relatives in the jungle, that was the basic idea, and to deny them giving information as to our whereabouts and all that type of thing.

Do you think they were successful?

Oh they were successful because there was no way, if you’ve

13:00 got no means of transport other than the odd pushbike, not everyone had a pushbike and shanks’ pony [walking] and you are moved a hundred and fifty mile away, you are too busy trying to get your paddy field or sweet potatoes, or whatever it is growing again so you can start to get back to an adequate standard or quantity of food again.

13:30 If they don’t catch anyone trying to get in or out there is a chance that you will be able to go back to cooking again or something like that because the rations weren’t big. And you have got nursing mothers, grandmothers and all that there and it was a devastating blow to them, it really was.

Despite how bad it made the individual soldier feel with the hatred you were talking about, ultimately it was

14:00 **a worthy thing?**

I would say it helped, yeah I’d say it did because you denied them access and helped us with our security and that was about it. They did this and every town had a fence around it and there was one way in and one way out. They dug underneath because you couldn’t patrol it all, but what you did patrol if you saw something you would ambush it and

14:30 we got a few that way. It was funny. I was at a sergeants’ mess in Ipoh one night, a British sergeants’ mess and they had been out and two of the sergeants had got a kill each, “Beauty mate, you got a kill. Oh God, well done, so and so has got a kill, oh lovely.” It was a most unusual

15:00 atmosphere that they would carry on like this, “Got a kill. Have a beer on me, cheers,” and some poor bugger pushing up daisies and that was the attitude of it. You went out into the bush and you fought your war and you came back and you lived Somerset Maugham pre-war style, stengahs [whisky] at four and sit on the… Tiffin [afternoon tea] and all that type of stuff.

15:30 It was because most of the population were expatriate police, planters who had been used to that lifestyle and we were rather recent interlopers and they took us under and we lived that style. We had one officer used to have a cigarette holder and he

16:00 said, “We are going to have a ding. Struth.” And this used to go on and really it was the most unreal lifestyle they lived apart from the war. You finished that and you go and would saddle up into your gear and away you would go out and it was on again. But the lifestyle lived by the people in the messes and in the cities was really something else again.

16:30 The poor cows never had a hope because the Poms had a lot of Ghurkha battalions there and with them they would have upwards of a hundred and fifty thousand troops smothering Malaya. These blokes measured in their couple of hundred and might have had a thousand or two thousand at the best; they never had a hope.

What was your impression of the Ghurkhas?

Magnificent, magnificent In my capacity,

17:00 nothing to do with us, but this mob sniped the British CO and so they said the Ghurkhas are undone and the new CO is there and they want a signaller and we are lending you to this Ghurkha battalion. I said, "Fair enough." Down I went and I met this CO, he greeted me like his long lost brother,

17:30 call me by my first name and I said that wasn't on, so I became, "Syd, my dear, dear, dear Syd." He was a genuinely great bloke and he gave me this bloke whose name, they all finished up with Bahada, their names all finished up with Bahada and I can't remember his name, and he said, "He is yours, he will do whatever you tell him." I said, "All right." Well I couldn't move,

18:00 he was right there behind me whatever. One night I went to bed, I'd had a few beers and I decided I had to go to the little boys' room [toilet] and I came out and I felt something and I froze. I thought, "They have got me." He said, "Goodnight sahib." It was him. And he felt my collar

18:30 because I slept in a starched jacket and he knew that and I had this starched jacket on. We used to wear a safari jacket and I didn't have a lot of clothes with me so I just threw this on to sleep in. He felt it and as soon as he felt the starch he knew it was me. But they all have this cookery and they carry that with them and they are very ferocious little men, very ferocious little men but they are as loyal as anything.

I have heard a story,

19:00 **you can tell me whether it was true or not, but the way the Aussies laced up their boots was important for the Ghurkhas as well?**

That I don't know, it never came to that. We were wearing, it is like a sandshoe but it was a green boot, green with black rubber on it and it came up to there. And I was never told the way, you just laced our boot up whichever way you liked. I used to do the crossover like that because if anything happened and you had to take it off

19:30 it just meant running a knife down and the whole thing was open and that was a personal choice. There was never any instruction that I heard of and I would say that they didn't.

You are still wearing khakis?

No, we were wearing jungle greens over there. In a way the jungle green was all right but they were Pommy pattern and the mistake there was, because the Indians, everything was under contract

20:00 and one man apparently through both means, fair and foul, had all the contracts. He used to subcontract and they would subcontract and all that. All your rations came by subcontract. You had boot boys, they were contracted and this type of thing. When the Indians did the washing, the trousers were there and you had a buckle either side and if you didn't take or think

20:30 to take the buckles off your trousers or tell the boot boy to take them off when they were washing, they had this big sloping cement slab and he would grab five or six pair of trousers by the bottom of the legs and of course all the buckles were going and so you get all shapes when you got them back. If you were in camp or on

21:00 ceremonial duty you used to wear puttees and hose tops with little red tabs, shorts with a starch and rank insignia was white and we belonged to the 28th Commonwealth Brigade, that patch on there, and the Australian Rising Sun on there. Those jackets were very good, but stupidly we used to have to cut the pockets off them and tuck them in our shirt so we could wear

21:30 a web belt. Don't ask me why but that was it. Good safari uniform and we used to have to cut the pockets off and that is how we used to wear them. We had Indians doing the washing and everything was very heavily starched unless it was bush gear and you used to tell the boys, "No starch, no starch." When we got it back from the laundry you used to have to do this anti-miting.

22:00 One operation I had an experience. This fellow denies it, but too many people say it is true for him to, but the batman down the seams, all the seams of the trousers get done and we were going in to put this radio station in and this batman had supposedly

22:30 anti-mited this bloke's gear and we got into this river, and he hadn't done it with anti-mite, he had done it with mosquito repellent. I was down the back where the sergeant is and when I got there he was over the other side but they reckon the last twelve strides he did it on top of the water – he didn't do it through it. When I got there his pants were down his ankles and he was trying to scoop water up into his nether regions and get this out, so that was it.

23:00 Your laundry just used to get washed and then you anti-mite it. That is what Malaya was like; it was an unreal world. It used to be really nice in the jungle – it was a lovely temperature. Now and again the animals, the gibbons and that, if they took a set at you

23:30 they would throw anything at you and make noise like anything. We would sit and wait for them to go away because if you moved they would just follow you whooping. And of course it was just like a jungle

telegraph. I saw tigers, I saw an elephant, stacks and stacks of monkeys and once I was out with a bloke, it was a voluntary job because

24:00 his signaller was on leave, so he was another sergeant, and he said, “How about coming out and doing sig for me because what’s-his-name is on leave?” I said, “Fair enough.” The troops had gone out on all their patrols. And this bloke used to eat raw onions and I am laying down reading a book and he called me all the names under the sun and he told me I was a thief. He got up and gone somewhere and I said, “Why? What have I done?”

24:30 He said, “You pinched my onion.” I said, “I never pinched your onion.” He said, “Who else would take it?” And he accused me of being a robber and a thief and all that and he laid down and he said, “Hey Syd,” he said, “I apologise, mate.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You are not a thief.” I said, “I told you that.” He said, “Look up there.” And I looked up there and here is this bloody great python with a head like a dinner plate and it has his onion in its mouth. We used to have with us Iban trackers and

25:00 they are from the natives from Borneo and they reckoned it was baguse macarne, which is good food. And we wouldn’t let him eat him but we got him down out of the trees in various ways and I forget, there was something like five or six blokes holding this python and he never got his onion back either. He was a good python. Saw a few things

25:30 like that – spiders when the sun shines on them. There is a lot of beautiful sights in the jungle, some of the birds, some of the flowers and all that. And most of us used to prefer to be in the jungle rather than in camp.

Did the army ever lecture you on the point of you being there to stop the communist terrorists was all about?

You knew what it was and you knew that it was and that was it. And

26:00 we got lectures on the way up there and that type of thing but once you were in it you only ever got the state of operations and all that, and when we were coming home we got thanked very much for what we had done. This is one of the things I used to get mad about when old Mahathir used to go off and talk about the Australians. He forgets the fact that we helped him keep the country he now governed.

26:30 By and large politics never got down to our level or anything like that. We were just happy to be there.

What were the… It is obviously so different from Korea, what were the standout differences?

The climate for a start. It rains nearly every day in Malaya in the afternoon and you have a hot, sweaty day and then you get a storm, torrential rain, and then it is absolutely beautiful. To sit there

27:00 in the cool of the evening and have a nice, slow drink it is phenomenal. In those days when we weren’t on leave we had our little company mess, and those who weren’t on patrol used to sit and have a couple of beers, write your letters home and maintain your gear and that. When you went on leave you went into the towns like Ipoh. Ipoh is the centre of the

27:30 Kinta Valley which a big tin mining area, predominantly Chinese, very, very rich money and they have lots of millionaires and they have these great beautiful old clubs built a hundred years ago, and you are invited into those and the elegance of life and the way that they live. The expatriates of course

28:00 in there they used to look after you. You never wore uniform on leave up there. You had to wear long sleeves by night and you had to have a tie as well. It was civilian clothes. And so you were treated very elegantly and very well. The local native population, as most of them had a relative of some sort out there in the bush they didn’t like you. The Indians didn’t care, he was trying for his existence.

28:30 And the Malayan, all he thought who he was going to dob in for not praying five times that day or how much rubber he could steal. The Malays weren’t very much thought of at all. They had virtually two armies, they had the Royal Malay Regiment where you had to be pure born Malay, obviously a Muslim,

29:00 and you had to be fully sanctified in that regard. Then they had the Federation Army who took Indians, Malays, Chinese or anybody who would serve. They used to have, the Sikhs used to have turbans and everybody else used to have a hat. They got all the stuff different from the Royal Malay Regiment. If you are not pure born Malay you

29:30 cannot own land, no matter who you are. You can have a lease but you can’t own it. If you are not Malay, or if you are Malay if you employ anybody, I think it’s twenty per cent must go to Malay whether you want to or not. Every town’s taxi licence, twenty per cent must be Malay. Malays get over and above everybody else in the Federation.

30:00 Because the Malays are Muslims, the governing party is the United Malay National Organisation so there is no way in the world they are ever going to get beat, and that is why they are so well off as opposed to the others. Indians are at the bottom of the tree, I think. The Tamil Indian, he is as black as your tripod there and he gets all the menial tasks.

30:30 The other castes and that of Indian, they seem to own the haberdasheries and the cloth emporiums and that. And the Chinese have the big business and all the money and that’s the way I divided it up.

Every bloke we have spoken to who served in Malaya loved it, reckoned it was the best posting they ever had.

It was a good posting, it was an excellent posting and

31:00 we enjoyed it because we worked hard out in the bush and we liked it very much. We didn't lose many men. I think we lost more to car accidents than we did to enemy action. We lost a couple to enemy action but we got more than we lost so we came

31:30 out on the plus side. The weather was quite pleasant – it was hot and in the dry season was hotter than in the wet. But in the wet of course you got this magnificent storm every night. And the living was very good outside the camps. Due to contract you had a boot boy to clean your boots, you had a boot boy to make your bed and we had mess staff so it was very good indeed.

32:00 **It certainly wasn't regimented?**

No, our boss at the time, from the time he started until we got home and he went away we never had a parade. When he was going and the new CO called us all together and we formed up on parade he came on to say farewell his first words were, "Close in, blokes."

32:30 And he still lives down the Gold Coast and he just talked to us. We were his boys and he was ours and he respected us and we respected him, and he never went for any regimentally and stuff. You were there to do a job and he was very well liked.

You sound very moved by this fellow. How important is that sort of leadership?

He would be the best I have ever served under and

33:00 I think as a battalion, which is a thousand men, if he said, "We are going to take Beijing," we would have gone. We would have; he was that kind of bloke. We had a sergeant, his mother owned a record shop and we had the officers' mess and the sergeant's mess and Slim Dusty made 'The Pub with No Beer'

33:30 and so 'The Pub with No Beer' played and it played and it played and I forget what time it was but a phone call came and he must have said to this bloke, "Put it on the speaker," and he said, "I know another pub that will have no beer if I hear that one more time." It stopped playing for the night. And the next morning he came over and borrowed it and took it back in the officers' mess.

34:00 He was a great bloke, he really was.

What was his name?

John White. I believe he still lives down the Gold Coast and I cannot imagine anybody who would not speak of him with great affection.

When you first got posted to Malaya was it the same thing? Did you know how long you were going to be there for?

Yes we knew, two years. You had three battalions and two years there and two

34:30 battalions at home. One of them would come home and they knew they had two years to go, and that went on up until, I think we were there, when did the last ones come home? About '67 I think the last ones came home. I am not sure of that. I think they gave Malaya, although we still had a company of troops go up to Butterworth as far as I know for three months at a time. You knew

35:00 two here, four there, two here, because we had three battalions.

Because the mess had a lot of that sort of contracting going on, did you find yourself eating curries and that sort of food?

No, no, they used to have curries but we had our own cooks. But all the rations were bought on a scale from a contractor and that money was allocated and that is how they did it. We used to have tinned

35:30 rations and then ration packs for bush work. I think it is one day a week you had to eat tinned rations and that kept the tinned rations being turned over so they didn't go off. They got the normal ration scale and that type of thing.

Had anything really essentially changed between the Australian Army being outfitted for war in Korea to Malaya?

36:00 No, in Korea we were generally outfitted by the Poms. We wore Pommy cold weather gear and we wore Pommy greens because we didn't have any, and in the interim we had Australian greens and boots and we wore the canvas Pommy boots, and the little bush hat was Pommy so we were outfitted by the Poms. Because of the jungle

36:30 a lot of blokes gave away the rifle and took on the number 5 rifle, which is known as the jungle carbine, that eventually gave way to a shotgun with special ammunition. The Bren gun was stripped and cut down for lightness because it was too heavy to carry all the time, and we did away with the Owen gun,

the 9 mm, because the

37:00 ammunition was affected very much by the tropical weather. Until I would say the end of our first tour we were still with .303 carbines and the Bren gun and that was about it, and shotguns. All the vehicles were Brit, the whole lot was British Land Rovers and that,

37:30 Bedford trucks. We virtually had nothing in that regard. That was the difference to it. One was all like the big calibre stuff, which didn't affect us, but we had anti-tanks weapons. In Malaya they had some but they were just put in storage. By that time we had gone from the big breech-loading 17-pounder to this awful looking thing which was the bat and the no bat, which

38:00 it is a recoilless rifle about 76 mm. You fed this great big thing and about seventy per cent of it comes out the back and the other thirty per cent fires a projectile out the front. That was about the main change because the climate demanded the different types of gear. The anti-miting was the same, anti-mosquitoes, we were still on Paludrine, that had changed. With the

38:30 Yanks in Korea they had the early model choppers [helicopters] and many more of them. Our boss wouldn't use helicopters. You could count on one hand the amount of time we used helicopters to get a sick or wounded man out to save a life, that was the only time. Because nine times out of ten if you wanted to get something out of the jungle you had to winch it up or cut an LZ [Landing Zone] and you never carried axes, you carried machetes and

39:00 that is a damn big job trying to clear a helicopter pad, I can tell you.

Tape 9

00:34 **What was it like when you came home from your first tour?**

Well we came home, we finished and we came home on an Italian ship called the Flaminia. We had a magnificent trip home on that. Our CO demanded that we spend an hour on deck with no shoes on,

01:00 let the air at the feet and try and get it because we had a bit of problems with tinea and all that type of problems there. We had a few times of leptospirosis, which is a debilitating thing, so we had a real gentlemen's tour home. And when we got off the boat in Sydney they demanded we go to South Head

01:30 where we were processed and no march through the town or anything like that, and we just went straight on leave from South Head.

Were there women and kids on that ship home as well?

Yes, women and kids. They brought the wives home.

Can I just ask you there, what sort of effect did it have on guys when their families were able to be there with them?

With us there very little

02:00 because our boss would not wear discrimination of any kind like that up there and they were a hundred miles away, so when you were in camp you were virtually, whatever your strength was of single men there altogether. When it came leave time you all went on the same amount of leave and you went on leave. There were certain dispensations at times,

02:30 when say Mum was pregnant or ill or something, and no-one ever minded a bloke going home for that because he was out of the battalion and gone; he was on leave. When he was back he was treated the same as anyone else so we never had any discrimination there at that time.

Still it must make the blokes feel better that at least they are only a hundred miles away, not a thousand, a couple of thousand miles away?

See in my experience

03:00 when I came home, the first time was before I went back the second time was when I got married, and I tell everybody I had a long youth. We got married then and when I was in Vietnam I never worried about it. I was married then; I had a job to do so I did my job. When we were in Borneo I was married and our daughter was born while I was in Borneo.

03:30 That was something, that is that and here and now is what you are worried about. I never noticed any discrimination at all. Now and again a wife would get sick in some manner or other. The bloke would go home and make sure the kids were… The amahs were quite, every house had a amah and they would make sure that the amah was looking after the kids, that the neighbours were aware of what was going on and they would

04:00 sort it all out and then get back to the battalion. No, I never experienced discrepancies or discrimination in any shape ever up there then.

Was it while you were back after your first tour that you met and married?

Yes, we came back to Enoggera and the same thing happened as when we came home from Korea – the battalion was posted every which way so we had to start from virtually scratch

04:30 to build it up again. And then whilst we were there we weren't home that long and somebody got the bright idea that the organisation of the army would change and we would go onto this wonderful thing called pentropic organisation. Instead of everything being in threes, it would become fives. Then they

05:00 did away with the old webbing that we had been cannibalising to make do with and rehashing and all that type of thing. A lot of us in Malaya carried the Bergan pack. A lot had packs made and all this type of thing because the Australian Army did not have suitable equipment for it. A lot of us carried our gear on parachute belts

05:30 that used to be wrapped around the goods that were dropped to us when we were being fed by air. It was a damn hotchpotch. And then someone got the bright idea and they brought us the English 1944 pattern webbing, which was a bloody sight worse because the Pom never gets any more than a half a day's march past the end of the tram line so you had no capacity for carrying and it was purely for

06:00 European conditions and it was virtually totally useless. And the Yanks by this time had started to go into the Kevlar helmet and as a result they had a great surplus of the Second World War type which the Australian Army snapped up and put the Rising Sun there and said, "You have got a new helmet." It was as much use as a hip pocket in a singlet.

06:30 **How did they put a Rising Sun on the helmet?**

With a little decal, just a little decal. And then of course you had to have a camouflage net all over the top so you couldn't see the decal. So as I say it was like a hip pocket in a singlet. And about that time they started to muck around with our boots and we finished up with the GP [General Purpose], that is the one up here with leather that comes. We did a couple of years of trials

07:00 on different kinds and something to do with socks. They gave us a pair of socks which you had to wear in conjunction with your others for three months and then you had to give one back so that they could test it. They had all these wonderful… Another thing, I don't know what it was for but we used to have, they had to bring in the pay grouping and so you had to qualify each year physically

07:30 for your pay, and then I don't know what it was for but they got a hundred of us counted, weighed and thoroughly investigated and then they like a suppository with a wire attached and we had to do a twenty mile march. I still haven't worked out what that was for. We were mixed up in all these weird and

08:00 wonderful things and this over superimposed over this. We went from four rifle companies to five rifle companies and I got the bug then that I was going to go parachuting. I went to Williamtown and came back after six jumps with a busted shoulder. I couldn't carry a pack so they said, "We will make you the RP [Regimental Police] sergeant. You can be a policeman." I said, "Good." That kept me in the battalion.

08:30 And we did a couple of exercises. In an infantry battalion that is supposed to be on foot. In the headquarters we had I think a hundred and thirty-six vehicles and we were exercising down in the area off the Putty Road to the west between the Putty Road and Rylstone and that area there. And we did a couple of exercises down there and in one

09:00 of them they even by any number of means took a Centurion tank across the ranges, a troop of tanks. The damn things, you couldn't hear anything, and they nearly run over the diggers, push trees down on the diggers. We deemed them a failure. We did a couple of big exercises down there for that and it was really a state of flux –

09:30 you never really got at it. The very first exercise we went up the north coast and we got into that area that is now Kawana Waters and all that, and we got that off the old Gympie Road and went in there. We had to go to the beach so we were heading east and we are up to here in water, about knee high,

10:00 and we came on these great drag lines and they were digging trenches in what was termed Wallam scrub – it is waterlogged sand, sand flies in abundance. And come on these drag lines and we said to the fellows, "What are you doing here?" He said, "We are draining the swamp." "What the hell are you going to do here?" He said, "Mate, in thirty or forty years you won't know this place. It will be full of houses." And we laughed at them and there it is now; that is what it is.

10:30 We went down and we camped at Mount Coolum and then they took us up in the Kennilworth Ranges on this exercise and they talk about Queenslanders never see, I saw snow it was nearly as bad as Korea. A cook died of hypothermia and we got up this morning and they said we had lost a Bren gun,

11:00 so no-one can move until they find this Bren gun. The damn thing had fallen over and was covered in frost and you couldn't even tell the outline of it the frost was that thick. So they found that and the cook died and they got another. And the funny thing about that, they gave us the combat smock that we had worn in Korea. They said, "We are going to do user trials on it," and they gave us one

11:30 for the battalion commander who slept in a warm tent and everything and everyone is outside shivering. At this time too they gave us the lightweight sleeping gear and a very thin silky sleeping bag and a thin blanket that buttoned – you folded it over and it interlaced with two straps which had press buttons and we went up there. About some time they called it off,

12:00 if you could ever believe such a term, "This is semi tactical." And there we are with roaring fires trying to get warm because the cook had died two or three nights before and things like that. We had this new gear, this new establishment, and the whole thing was just a state of flux the whole time. We got some new radio equipment and

12:30 some things and we changed from the three-inch mortar to the 81 mm mortar. They did away with the Vickers machine gun. They accepted the new recoilless rifle as opposed to the other things for the anti-tank weapon so it was just a big mix that period of time, the early '60s, nothing concrete in it at all. It was

13:00 really trial and error and that time of thing.

What sort of lay over was it before you went over for your second tour?

'63 we went back. We were married, I had got married in that time '62 I got married and the boy was born ten months later. The mother-in-law said, "You can stop counting." Yeah,

13:30 ten months later. And the wife stayed home for him to be born and I was in the bush and she arrived with him at six weeks old. She came and I was still a sergeant and originally they had us living out of camp. We were in a big camp in Malacca or Terendak,

14:00 capable of holding a brigade and they said as I was signals and cipher I had to stay in camp. So they moved us into camp and some people remained outside of camp through the whole tour. As such we were part of the SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] reserve and that was stationed there, the Poms and us. By this time the Kiwis

14:30 had upped their contribution. They had a battalion, we had a battalion and the Poms had a battalion plus ancillary arms and services. We spent our time based there. We did training exercises, and we were sort of north and west of Malacca on the coast and our training area was east of Malacca heading inland in a place

15:00 at Assahan and it was a large tract of virgin forest. We were south in Malaya and that was the first time I had ever seen dust in the jungle, and we gave away wearing the sandshoe type boot and we were wearing our normal boots. We hadn't been issued with GPs at that stage, we were still wearing the boots and gaiters.

15:30 There was a fair amount of ceremonial a fair amount of company training and a few battalion exercises. And then in '64 – we went up in late '63 – we got settled down and did a couple of exercises. And in '64 we went up to the Malay-Thai border

16:00 and we moved out of the SEATO thing again into anti-terrorist operations. Again we were separated in company lots out in the bush. The anti-terrorist part of it was rather farcical. Our main town was Alor Star and there was a Grik Alor Star, Bagin Serai and they…

16:30 What we were doing was ambushing the border and we weren't getting terrorists, we were getting smugglers and the border means nothing to those people. Ethnically they are one and they just trade between each other. And the fact that there is a line of round stone markers about that big means nothing to them, but if they cross the line either way we had to have them.

17:00 We finished manning our ambush positions with a picket on the weapons and all that in gym shoes and shirt, and as soon as the word said, "Go," away you went to try and catch whatever you could. We filled the gaols with oxen, barley and rice and all that on it and other so-called contraband and the word got out that we had amongst

17:30 these smugglers… Oh, bicycle parts was a very big item. The word got out that amongst these was a watch dealer so we wanted to catch the watch man and no-one ever could. I don't recognise that I ever actually saw him but a couple of fellows reckoned they did, and he was the most fleet of foot and no-one could ever get near him.

Would you say it did generate into a bit of a game?

It was. It was because

18:00 one bloke came to me and he brought this weeping, she would be nine and a half months pregnant lady and she couldn't run or anything, "What are you going to do with her?" I just patted her and said, "You be a good girl," and sent her on her way. I don't know whether she had watches hidden under there or not but she was deliciously pregnant as far as I was concerned. A few of them got pregnant women like that. One bloke in fact I found, apparently he,

18:30 from what the police told us, he had been visiting a village in Malaya from Thailand because his wife had been playing up and he confronted this bloke and he had run second and this fellow had carved him

up with a machete, so they were bringing him home on a stretcher. So we sent them on their way to the gaol and the police put him in hospital, and it really wasn't a

19:00 a real thing – we never had a contact or anything like that. We filled all the local gaols and precincts and whatever with oxen, smugglers, goods of all kinds and things of that nature.

Where were you when your son was born?

Out in the bush.

Were you told?

Yes, a telegram, first of all it came over the radio and then a telegram arrived, a cable rather than a telegram,

19:30 and then my wife followed me up and I came out of the bush and she arrived in Terendak airport on a DC3 and he was six weeks old. I was in Borneo when my daughter arrived and she was ten weeks old when I saw her. The first

20:00 time up there we were in a place called Sic and the amusement was chasing these smugglers and that type of stuff. That lasted I think four months we were up there, and then we came back and then we did garrison duties again.

20:30 I went up there twice and I am not quite sure whether I went before I went to Borneo. I think I went up in early '65 again before I went to Borneo and it was much the same thing. We went to Sic, the same place and the same points on the border, same thing from the police. The police stopped if you have got too many bullocks because once they were impounded the police had to feed them. The border stuff

21:00 there was a potential, that's all there was. There was never really any actuality with it at all. The fellows had a great time and they used to get leave every now and again. They would bring them out about, I think they brought them out a platoon at a time and they would bring them into camp where they had a box or a suitcase in the storeroom and

21:30 dress them up and they would send them down to Penang. A lot of them never got to Penang because to get to Penang you had to go through Butterworth, and Butterworth was the big RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] station and they had the Boaties Club, which was their equivalent of a canteen, and they used to feed us by air and so we had quite an affinity with them.

22:00 The fellows used to get down there and that is as far as a lot of them used to get with the boaties. Swan Brewery in West Australia used to supply them with beer free and Four and Twenty, the pies, they used to feed them, and they used to give them I think it was two pies per man per week flown up by the RAAF to the boaties. They used to have the pie, because the Poms and the Malays never heard of

22:30 a meat pie like we have a meat pie, so they used to listen to the football and have pies and beer of a Saturday afternoon. So when our fellows used to come in they used to treat them like kings, spoil them for a couple of days and you would get this hungover mob come back and you would have to march them into the gate. It was a fair deal as well.

How different was your second tour, the fact that you had your wife and your son there?

23:00 It was much different when you weren't in the jungle. We only did operations on the Malay-Thai border twice and we did Borneo so the rest of the time was garrison duties. The phrase we used to use was that you spent your life trying to out-Pom the Poms. Your lines had to look better than the Poms. It

23:30 was the first what I term, and I get into trouble for this, it was the first infringement of petticoat government into the army. The wives used to complain. We were never allowed to complain; we never thought of complaining. The wives used to complain. In garrison the dress of the day was boots with socks rolled down and we used to get issued with elastic-top blue shorts

24:00 and dog tags and a hat. Depending on what you were doing it was either a slouch hat or a bush hat. That was all right, so you felt comfortable and that is how you got about. But then we had to wear shirts because the girls came in to play tennis and they didn't like seeing men with no shirts, and of course the hackles start to rise and there are a few similar type incidents where this couldn't be done because it may offend the wives.

24:30 From the signal blokes there was a bit of resentment about things like that. Then they started the Wives Club, well it was actually going when we got there. The CO's wife was the President, the RSM's wife was the 2IC and they used to refer to each other as Mrs Sergeant so and so or Mrs Corporal so and so, and they are carrying their rank into the bedroom

25:00 or into the… And I didn't like that either and I made no bones about it and I still don't. That is the type of thing that was going on and that affected things. A digger I always reckon, provided he doesn't get into trouble, if a digger has had a hard time out he goes and lets his hair down and comes home singing a barrack room song that is his entitlement, frowned upon, upset the wives

25:30 so I was a bit anti wife in that regard for the time up there. We even had a warrant officer, his sole job was the maintenance of the wives in if a piece of furniture was broken and all that and he was there. We had another one who was, who

26:00 shall remain nameless, who couldn't go into operations or go out into the bush because his wife had bad nerves, and to my mind that man and his wife should have been sent home but he wasn't, he was kept there. I was very much against that and he wasn't a very popular man because of it, but he was wearing three stripes and a corporal used to have to do his job in operations because he

26:30 had to look after his wife and I think that is bloody unfair and I get a bit cross about it. That was the difference of garrison duties as opposed to what they did the first time.

So it was a lot more regimented the second time?

They did a lot more regimental parades and we used to have a lot more visiting dignitaries, a lot more people came up to visit so they would have a parade and colours marching on and all this type of thing and

27:00 a lot more of that went on.

What about what you did up in Borneo?

We went to Borneo in '65, a year before we came home. The Indonesians were doing what they call confrontation. The Malayas, or Malaya, had a pact with Singapore, Sarawak, what's the other one?

27:30 The British Borneo, there were three provinces there, Singapore and Malaya and they formed Malaysia and that was the entity. Well Sukarno, originally he didn't like that so he started his campaign of trying to push the British protectorates or whatever you call it off Brunei,

28:00 he started to push them off the island of Borneo so the Malays squealed and of course the British went in again, went in using Ghurkhas and I think, the Ghurkhas won a couple of VCs [Victoria Crosses] there and we wound up in Sarawak, which is the southernmost province, and we wound up south of Kuching. The idea was

28:30 to confront the Indonesians. We had a little hamlet called Bau, B A U, which had been a tin mining place and we had the headquarters and a D Company there. D Company wasn't much, it was a training and holding company. And then forward going onto the border we had Stass, Serikin and Knuckle

29:00 and these were three fortified positions which we manned because the way through the mountains came through these if you wanted to take Kuching. A tie was issued and it is the kitten on a key and Kuching means cat, and we reckoned we were the key to Kuching so you get this kitten on a key, and we were in that position there.

29:30 The British had intelligence and informants and we were in our fortified positions, and so we got in position and we waited and nothing happened, so the CO at the time took the view that the best form of defence was attack. We would send a company, we did it on a few occasions, a company

30:00 would go over and they ambushed the Indons [Indonesians] moving up to the border on Indonesian territory. In a few instances they went over where we had to establish a radio relay and that is where I came in. They would go over and I would have half a section of men and a couple of signallers so we would have possibly a maximum of ten all up, and

30:30 we would quietly go to a predisposed position and set up a relay station and make sure communications from the point of artillery and all that. If they needed artillery support and all that type of thing they could get that. We all used to laugh; we were told because there was no declaration of war or anything. We used to laugh because we were told, "If you are in a position that you are

31:00 going to get captured, immediately put your weapon on the ground and put your hand in the air and say, 'I am an Australian soldier and I am lost.'" You can imagine how that would have gone over! But luckily nothing ever happened to us. But we had a couple of big goes at the Indons and to cover themselves they put it out that they had training accidents, and it was reported

31:30 in the Straits Times. Once it hit the news in Indonesian the Straits Times, which is the Malayan English paper, they would pick it up and it was printed a few times about these horrific training accidents. On one of these occasions I know there were ninety-four dead so they were pretty decent sized ambushes that they would put on. On once instance they were in boats moving up a river and they

32:00 got them on the water.

So with manning the relay would you be able to sit there and practically follow what was going on?

Yes you knew exactly what was going on the whole time. The Indons knew what we were doing of course and so a couple of times they came looking for us, so we used to play a game of hide and seek because we weren't strong enough to take them on. And I had let our mob know because of enemy interference I was having to

32:30 move and I was heading in a north easterly or south westerly or whatever the direction was, and they as far as possible would, because they knew where I was, and when I had gone to the north west they would drop a few rounds down to the south-east in order to try and deter them. They were using 5.5 guns at that time and so that would deter them from coming to

33:00 us sometimes. They never really caught up with us, thank goodness.

It must have been pretty hairy?

A couple of times it was hairy. The Poms had a thing also that was brand new when we got there, where if the Indons fired a mortar or a cannon shell this radar would pick it up and it would give them

33:30 an eight figure readout which is within ten yards. I think it was eight, it might have been twelve figure, one or ten yards where that round was from. They would pass that to the guns and they would put that back. We came upon a mortar position once with a base plate in the ground and this 5.5 had landed within three feet of it, it was all mangled, the thing, and they hadn't bothered to pick the base plate up.

34:00 The mortar was blown away to hell but there were no bodies there when we got there but there was a lot of dead shrub around it, but that was the degree of support you could get. We had to keep out of the way of small arms stuff and things of that nature which we managed to do, and we always had artillery cover and we would try and let them know where you were and get cover that way. Once the ambush was sprung

34:30 and they were moving we used to try and move out ahead of them, and hopefully on one occasion I went across their line of march in the hope the Indons would run into them but they didn't. And when they got back I asked if they had seen anything and they hadn't seen anything at all. It was a bit hairy on occasions but we got away with it. So that was sort of Borneo. Other than that

35:00 you lived… Knuckle was pretty well all underground. In Serikin they built an above ground fort with corrugated iron about two feet apart and filled it with dirt. That got shelled once while I was there but nothing landed inside the compound. Stass was underground again. Just as we were moving in there one of our blokes who was on the advance party was in a position and he

35:30 had to move across the front to Stass, and he got half way and the Indons had put down a number of mines and hadn't marked them and he was our first casualty. He and a tracker went down with that. Of course the thing was to find out how many mines were there and where they were. So I joined a patrol

36:00 from A Company to which he belonged and they went out looking and they found the box, and the box contained, was made for eight mines. We found out where he had gone up, and they were these bouncing betty things and two of those had gone up, so there were two mines to be looked for. So the thing then was to find those. That platoon had it a bit rough because it was 3 Platoon and

36:30 he had gone over at full strength and his officer had got crook, and he ended up taking the platoon and he stood on the mine and he and his tracker went up. The corporal brought them in. They gave the RP sergeant at the time and another officer and he went out, the officer got crook, the platoon sergeant took it out and they came upon something in the bush and

37:00 they called the sergeant who was acting platoon commander up to have a look, and this digger stepped back off the track and up he went and took the platoon sergeant with him, and that was another two went. By this time the platoon was like that so they gave them another officer and another sergeant. At one stage it was going to be me because I

37:30 was the senior sergeant and the most experienced, and in actual fact I had my gear packed and they said, "You are going," and I wasn't very happy about it. But anyway they gave them another sergeant and lo and behold the officer got crook and this sergeant at the time, he said, "If any of you bastards let me stand on a mine I will kill you all." He went out and that was the end of it, and he brought them out and come back. That was the thing with the Indons, on a

38:00 couple of occasions after that. On one occasion they came upon the box and started looking and found the mines, and another time one of the blokes found mines and went around and we looked around, or they looked around, and they found mines again. They used mines against us at least four times that we found and they got four blokes in all, and

38:30 they never marked them so that was a bit rough, a bit hard to take. The first sergeant was particularly popular and the other bloke was fairly popular too. Both were married and I am not sure, I think both were buried in Terendak because we didn't come back for the funeral. The garrison in Terendak buried them.

Would they be carried out on stretchers or…?

Yes. The first bloke

39:00 they brought out what they could because there wasn't much, and on one of my sojourns I went back in later and I found that part of his leg so I marked it on the map and when we came back that way I blew it up, but there was a lot of him never made it back to Malaya. It wasn't much bigger than that on a stretcher.

39:30 Because he was a Korean bloke and he believed in what we called necklaces made with deck cord and grenades and all that, and because when the mine went up, they went up. It was very quick and all that for him but there wasn't much left to bury.

Tape 10

00:45 **Syd, could you tell us that story again about the hearts and mines?**

Hearts and mines, well we carried these out in Malaya on first and second tour and we also did them in Borneo.

01:00 In Malaya the absolute native is called a Saki and from time to time through government agencies you would get a report that these people were in need of assistance so we used to go out with medical supplies and then explosives. The medical supplies, the medics used to treat them with such things as yours, I believe it is an injection

01:30 of Vitamin A, and they had a lot of trouble in skin creases, whatever that may be, in forms of tinea and that so they used to paint them with mercurochrome. And we used to quite often have arguments amongst them that this one had red mercurochrome and that one had green and that one. They wanted them interchanged and they wanted the same colour so we quite often used to do that. And then

02:00 we would find a deep pool and we would put explosives in the water and blow the fish in the deep water and they would stand at the rapids downstream and collect the fish, the stunned fish as that came over. And it wasn't unusual to see a two foot child with a four foot fish and things like that. We used to camp near them but never with them. And they used to put on dances for us and give us a tune on their reed whistle

02:30 and things like that. And when we were in Borneo I went on one which went to a long house which contained shrunken heads. As a matter of fact I think there were seven or eight shrunken heads there; they were very old. Through an interpreter they told us how they did it. They would take the skull out and shrink that underneath and it is put up and kept forever in their hut and house.

03:00 The long house, the long house, apparently there are always two, one for all except eligible females and the eligible females live in the other one. When boy meets girl the boy apparently goes underneath the long house and a hand will come out and they sneak out to a little

03:30 tete-a-tete or something and they come to some form of agreement. I don't know what else, or if anything happens then the parents or the tribal elders are told and their form of marriage ceremony takes place and they become husband and wife and carry on from there. But the eligible females live in a separate one to the rest of the community and everything is done in there – cooking, eating.

04:00 The bathing is done in the river but they keep a lot of small pigs and they live in there as well on cold nights. It does get cold in Borneo. You snuggle up to a pig if there is nothing else to keep warm. They live a very simple life along these lines and I do believe they have a very high moral code. To see them, one get painted with the colour of mercurochrome and then she

04:30 likes the colour that the other one has been painted and come back and raise a bosom for you to paint underneath so they can have the same colour, the one they like. We did that on both tours in Malaya and in Borneo as well.

Did you see the effects of those hearts and mines programs having a positive or negative?

Definitely positive because the treatment of yours and that comes about

05:00 from vitamin deficiencies and things like that and so the government interpreters would ask advice from the medical people and tell them what to do about various ailments and things that they used to get. I am not sure if it is trachoma or some name but something, but eye drops they put in at times.

05:30 And the government agent knowing that disease exists in a tribe will have it in a bag and where he goes and he sees it will put eye drops in. By and large I think it does help a bit, but they never come out of the jungle to get any decent treatment or anything like that. They are like our indigenous people, they have their tribal ground and that is where they stay.

Did you see any missionaries over there at all?

06:00 No. The missionary days are over as such. The missionaries were out there when the Portuguese went and Malacca is a highly Catholic town and Saint Francis of Assisi is apparently buried in Malacca.

06:30 But no, the missionaries' field is sort of closed as it were. They regard themselves as civilised and they have the Muslim religion and the Sakis are too few in number to I don't think there would be any worry in it.

Was there a story about a CT captured by New Zealand?

Yes, the CTs were… The Kiwis actually

07:00 found him sitting on a road somewhere and when he was questioned they said, “Where are you from?” And it was up in our area and they said, “Why didn’t you give yourself up to the Australians?” He said, “Oh no, Australians will eat you and I didn’t want to be eaten,” so he came down to give himself up to the Kiwis. That is as the story went. Obviously it wasn’t true because I think

07:30 they would be too tough anyway.

How did that rumour start?

Don’t know. In captured documents I have seen they used to make wild allegations against different nationalities to put the fear into stop them surrendering. When privations come one of the first thoughts come, “If I surrender and get away

08:00 I can end all this privation.” So to make sure or try and make sure they don’t give themselves up they used to feed them with all the rubbish in the world. They used to have trials and from memory they used to get demerits. They had men and women CTs and if a man was casting unwarranted glances at a female he would most probably get publicly berated, and three

08:30 demerits in the commander’s book and vice versa and things like that. For heinous crimes they used to execute them and that is in their documentary evidence at times where blokes have done stuff bad enough and they executed them. They used to have this demerit system of public berating for different things and all that type of stuff.

09:00 So all these rumours could well emanate from their own commanders in order to keep them in line and that is our supposition anyway.

How did your wife find her experience in Malaya?

She enjoyed it. She was a new wife and she had a new baby and she had an amah. The amah was a

09:30 delightful old Chinese lady and they used to talk together and she was a wonderful cook, and we used to pay her extra and she used to cook beautiful Chinese dinners for us, and if we wanted to go to a mess function or something like that we would pay her to babysit for us and things like that. As a matter of fact our boy, the eldest one, whilst he didn’t say anything to us,

10:00 he could understand her Chinese I think before he could understand us. And she used to speak to him in Chinese and he used to do what she asked and this is when he was a baby. She was lovely and she made life very good for my wife up there, as most of them did. He was a blond baby and very, very, proud of a blond baby;

10:30 the Chinese amahs used to love blond babies. It is a wonder that the blond babies didn’t get sunburnt because if they were wheeling a blond baby they would pull the hood of the carriage down so the blond hair was there for all to see. Very, they loved blond babies. My wife says that she enjoyed it up there.

How did she find the whole army

11:00 **life? Was that her first introduction into the army?**

Into army, she will kill me for this but she was an air force officer when we met at the winter ball at Amberley. We were invited up there and she was the officer in charge of WAAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force] at Amberley Air Base, and we met and she was invited back to our mess, and she came and I invited her out.

11:30 So she had about ten years in the air force so she was used to service life of a kind. It wasn’t totally strange to her so she enjoyed the army life. She didn’t like me being away so much. In the tour of Malaya that I was there with her I spent I would imagine at least almost fifteen to eighteen

12:00 months away. I was never home much at all and she didn’t like that part of it, and I didn’t either because I was missing my young bloke. And then when the other one came, although she was only a baby, you like to be with your kids but that wasn’t so. I think essentially she enjoyed our service life and Malaya very much.

What about the whole,

12:30 **the Wives Club that was formed, how did she find that?**

At my request she didn’t join. I was a male chauvinist. I have nothing against wives getting together and being friends and all that and the idea that she was known as Mrs Sergeant Webster as opposed to Mrs Corporal Smith or Mrs Colonel so and so I didn’t agree with it at all, and I asked her

13:00 not to join and she didn’t.

Did that have any repercussions for her?

No, not at all. Whenever it came up in the form of conversation or something like that with higher

authority I very quickly reminded them it was me in the army not my wife, and it was accepted.

Your daughter was born whilst you were

13:30 **in Borneo?**

Yes they had a big hospital and the wife tells me, the little bloke, the amah used to look after him. She went to hospital and we lived next door to a Kiwi and his wife was pregnant as my wife and the pair of them marched into the hospital. The amah looked after the little baby,

14:00 the little boy, and she and the baby weren't allowed into the hospital to visit mothers and she used to come and walk outside, up and down each day, so the wife could see the young fellow. She so often says he wasn't interested in her because there were monkeys in the trees near the lawn and he was

14:30 more interested in the amah and the monkeys than he was in his mother. He was only just under two and he was only a little fellow and she used to dote on him so he fared very well. So she had the baby and I never saw the baby until I came home from Borneo.

She didn't have any problems?

No, we had been very fortunate

15:00 with each of our children; she had no problems with any of them. I had more problems after she came home from hospital with the third one because we were in Woodside, South Australia, and she dragged me out of bed at some ungodly hour and I took her to the hospital and the sister said, "You have done your job. We will see you when it is all over," so I went home and went to sleep. That is a fact I have never been allowed to forget.

15:30 But I did bath, I was the first one other than my wife when she was in the hospital, I was the first one to bath that one. She is in England at the moment and she and I have a very close bond together.

Was it hard for your son losing his amah?

I don't think he fully understood; he

16:00 was only just two when we got home. I don't think he understood it was like that. You wouldn't know, he wasn't a well baby. It wasn't until we got home and we went to South Australia that he had a tummy problem. I am not quite sure whether it was coeliac or something like that, which he has grown

16:30 out of and all that, but we were in Adelaide when it was fully diagnosed and treated. But I don't think he was an absolutely well baby so I don't think he dwelt on that like relationships and that at the time.

Has he ever tried to learn Chinese?

No, not that I know of, no. I don't think he has pulled on linguists or anything like that.

You finished up

17:00 **in Borneo and…?**

We finished up in Borneo. We had the British, they don't call them an aircraft carrier now but they are an aircraft carrier converted and they carry a squadron of helicopters, a squadron of Royal Marines, and they go round and they brought a battalion of Ghurkhas in

17:30 to relieve us and we piled on these helicopters and they took us out to this ship, the HMS Albion, and they took us. And when we got off Terendak Camp they put us in landing barges and brought us onto the beach. It is a bit of a case where the right hand didn't know where the left hand was doing. They had all the wives and the children on the

18:00 beach to greet us, that was the orders from the land base mob, and our mob said, "You are not allowed to talk to them." So we got off the landing barge and marched us straight up into camp. My wife was there with the two kids and I didn't see her because we were told we weren't allowed to go into the crowd and say g'day. We had to get up into camp and get de-armed and

18:30 de-ammunitioned and all that type of thing and get everything squared away so we could go on leave. They took… It would have been better to postpone the greeting until we could go home rather than have a meeting there which it would be hard to round people up from and then go up and start work again. It depends on your point of view which was the better way, but no fraternisation on the beach was the order of the day so

19:00 I didn't see the baby until I got home that night.

What was that like?

Great. She was a very good baby, very good looking baby, and talked with the two and played with the little fellow and all that type of thing. The amah had cooked a great magnificent feast for me and all this type of thing so it was a good homecoming.

19:30 **How long were you in Malaysia?**

Only a couple of months. I think we came out of Borneo in the July and then we were ferried home again in aeroplane lots. We didn't come home as a battalion and while we were in Borneo the Indonesians made an abortive landing at Terendak near

20:00 the swamps there. And that is on the western side of Malaya so you get backwater beaches, you don't get the beautiful pristine beaches there because the tides flow from east to west and Malaya is in the way, and you have these backwaters up there and consequently there is a lot of mangroves and all that. And these poor devils, whoever they were, our rear details as we called it, and the Indonesians apparently had a fight all one

20:30 night and the Indonesians couldn't shoot because their landings were made in second-hand rowing boats type of thing, and their weapons were clogged with mud so they couldn't fire. And our blokes had hundreds of rounds of ammunition and never hit a thing. So it was nil all each apparently but it put the wind up the wives. It happened a bit away from the camp and we were a bit undone in Borneo because

21:00 they were between us and our families. But it came to nothing. It was a fight one night. And they we picked up all the so-called insurgents and they played it up in the Straits Times and that played it up into a magnificent victory and no-one got hurt. Only the Indonesians lost a lot of face and that was about it. Other than that there was nothing untoward.

21:30 Because of the confrontation they got us out of bed at… I don't think we went to bed. We had to leave the house and travel to Terendak Airport where we got into DC3s I think it was and then they took us to Singapore where we got onto pretty much 707s. And the wife and I when we were loaded into the aircraft we were

22:00 right up the front and there was a wall in front of us into which a bassinet was attached so the baby was able to be put in there, and we nursed the little bloke. We got in and we flew back up to Malaya as far as Penang and we went way out into the Indian Ocean and then we turned south and then we came into Perth. From memory we took off very early in the

22:30 morning and we had a couple of hours or that in Singapore, two or three hours in Singapore, and then we took off from Singapore and then we flew all day and we got to Perth at night. We were allowed off the aircraft but we weren't allowed to leave the airport because of customs and that. They refuelled the aircraft and all that type of thing and then we got back on again and then we flew

23:00 across to Sydney, and then we got off that and onto another aircraft and into Brisbane. It took us just over thirty hours nonstop to do the whole trip. We were on leave effective that we got into Brisbane and my wife's people then lived at Coorparoo and we spent our leave

23:30 in Coorparoo. And the battalion was formed again in Woodside, South Australia. At the completion of leave we went down and joined the battalion at South Australia. We made, well I told them what I was doing and they arranged transport and we flew to Adelaide

24:00 to a hotel there that they booked for us, and then of course was a married quarter. And being newly married – we only married just before we went over – and we had a furnished flat and it was in a furnished house in Malaya. So it fell to us there we had to get a married quarter in Woodside and then shop for furniture and all that type of thing and then get that transported out

24:30 to Woodside and get into the married quarter there, which we did. The people of Adelaide were very good to us. It was both our first times there and on one day I said to, we didn't know where, we were looking for Myers, was one store, so I said to this policeman, "Where is Myers?"

25:00 And he came back and said, "Are you new in town?" And I said, "Yes. I am in the army and I am just home from Malaya and I have been posted there and I have got to get…" So he has grabbed one of the kids and he said, "You bring one," and he took us right to Myers. And when the Myers people found out our circumstances they couldn't do enough for us. And we struck this wherever we went in Adelaide; it was marvellous. Buying refrigerators

25:30 and all the whitegoods and everything like that and the furniture and all this, everywhere we went we received this and it made it so much easier and it was very good. We got into the married quarter. The housing settlement there was called Inverbrackie, most of it has been pulled down now. These were 1950s–60s houses,

26:00 very old, very small, but with the babies… And again the battalion had nothing, everyone had been posted out. They split the battalion in half, oh more than that, and all Victorians and single men went to form 7RAR and

26:30 all the South Australians and married men stayed to reform 3 Battalion. Again we had no troops, no guns, no nothing, so we had to form up again. And then they restarted, no, National Service had restarted and we got a large intake of National Servicemen in to build the battalion up again.

27:00 I was coming up then I had just about my eighteen years in the army then and we decided that it wasn't the place for a married man, etc.

Why wasn't it the place for a married man?

You can't serve two masters, and once you get married you have to be there for your wife and family. At the same time you have

27:30 got to be there for the army and to be true to one or the other you have got to make a choice. And I still adhere to the fact that it is no place for the married man, even though I stayed on for another nine years. But again I found myself where I could without too much

28:00 disharmony having to put my wife and that before the army, and I don't think that is right. I think in certain situations it could cost you lives, and when you are away from your family so much you are not being fair to your wife and children. We decided that anyway we would get out, so I made enquiries what is the best to do this… And the new CO of the time,

28:30 whom I had known, before said, "I will put you up to CES [Commonwealth Employment Service] and I will get you a posting to Brisbane and you can make your way out of the army." He got me posting to a CMF unit in Kelvin Grove, right in the heart of Brisbane, and we came up to Brisbane and got

29:00 into a house and I went to the CES, I think it was CES in those days, and this bloke sat me down and gave me an interview and all that and asked me what I had done and where I had been and all these things, and his remarks were, "There is no job for you in civilian life." He said, "If ever we need an assassin, I will send for you."

29:30 I thanked him for his time and I went home to the wife and told him what he said and she said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I could try the then PMG [Post Master General's Department]," which became Telecom and Telstra, due to my signals experience and the line work I'd done and all that. By this time we had the third baby

30:00 and I went to the Telstra office, the PMG office, and got an interview there and told them all I had done and they said, "We would take you, you just fit the age. No," I was just too old on the age, "but because you are an ex-serviceman and all that we would make an exception." But the wages, I would have to go down

30:30 to I think a fourth or fifth-year apprentice wages while I did training on line work and all that. That wasn't possible when you have got three kids to keep so I went home and we discussed it and I said, "Time is running out for me. We had better decide. I will sign on for a couple of years while I am waiting." So I signed on for three years,

31:00 it wouldn't be all that long and I could get out and in the meantime I could have a look for a job. The CMF I wasn't very happy with. The mob I was with had been there for years and I walked in as a regimental soldier and all that type of thing and they didn't want to know much about that at the time, and they used to spend their life from 8 o'clock until

31:30 10 o'clock playing cards – they were very good at crib [cribbage] – and 10 o'clock to 3.30 they would spend in the pub or at the Brisbane Cricket Ground and then they would go home. I wasn't rapt in that and I couldn't afford to do that, so and then I had another one of my arguments with authority because I wore my regimental badges.

32:00 The CMF CO of the time he said to me, he sent word through the RSM, "Tell this bloke to take down his regimental badges and put up his CMF badges," and I said, "No I won't because I am attached to you. I still belong with the Royal Australian Regiment." Well that put the cat right among the pigeons and eventually I had to go before him and he told me I had to take them down and I told him I wouldn't.

32:30 And he was threatening all these dire things he was going to do to me and I said, "Fair enough." An old acquaintance and officer of mine came in and asked me what I was doing there and I told him, and he said, "In all your signals work you should come and join army aviation." He said, "You should be pretty good at it and why don't you?" And I said, "I didn't know it was on and available. Can you

33:00 help me?" He said, "Put in an application and I will help you," which happened. Within nothing… And I didn't take my badges down. And I went to army aviation at Amberley and traded in my cap for a blue beret but still maintaining my badges because we were then filling in what we call a non-corps posting, still keep your badges but do a job outside the corps.

33:30 I did some psychiatric assessment and they said, "Yes, this bloke could be trained as an air traffic controller."

Do you remember the psychiatric questioning?

Not really, it come out of books and all that type of thing but I can't remember them. Some of them were weird and wonderful and some don't apparently have any purpose, but apparently they all do. I just remember the

34:00 medical and they flip books for colour blindness and all that, but I can't remember any of the questions. I know I got sick of filling in my number, name and rank. They said, "All right," and I was in the control tower at Amberley waiting to go for training at Sale in Victoria and Vietnam was on. This is

34:30 late 1967 and I got a call to go to the CO's office and I went to the CO's office and one of our helicopters had been shot down in Vietnam and the pilot escaped unhurt but the warrant officer was

35:00 injured. I am not sure whether he had one or two broken legs but however they had to get him out of the country, so the CO said to me would I go up and delay my course by one year and he would see I was right if I did this. I asked him if I could talk it over with Enid, my wife, so I went home and the atmosphere was quite cold.

35:30 And she said, "You won't be satisfied until you go. Is there any way out of it?" I said, "I can't say I don't want to go," because you didn't know how long it was going to last or anything. I got a very reluctant, "Yes," so I said I would go. In the meantime while I was with the CMF I had been loaned

36:00 to a training cadre at Greenbank and we were training like the Korean days, the corps conversions and individuals not travelling as a unit to go in as replacements in Vietnam. I had been out there as an instructor so they waived me having to do a course and I arrived in Vietnam in early '68 just in time

36:30 for Tet, for the Tet defensive, the big one in '68 when Charlie got into Saigon and 3 Battalion was fully committed in Borneo. 1RAR was fully committed and 2/4 RAR were just going on operations the day I arrived. I joined them then, 161 Reconnaissance Flight,

37:00 as their squadron sergeant major. My predecessor was a very good soldier and all that but he loved flying and so the unit needed a bit of attention as far as the sergeant major was concerned because I wasn't all that rapt in flying. My boss, the squadron commander, was away

37:30 up doing convoy cover just south of Bien Hoa and so the 2IC welcomed me into the unit and I settled in and things like that. The boss made a fly down to meet me and he had a day and a night with me and he flew back. One day, the next morning he was doing convoy cover and he was shot down and

38:00 killed. He was the first aviation death in Vietnam. His name was George Constable. We got a replacement. And it was required that on a number of operations that an observer fly with the,

38:30 on different sorties, and I flew a couple of sorties and I didn't like it much because you had an M60, which electronically fired as a machine gun mounted on these little Bell helicopters, just had a plastic bubble around you. The pilots would fly and they would always fly in left-hand circles so it was all coming in my door, not his, and I wasn't happy about that.

39:00 We were expected if we found Charlie in the open to go and have a go at him, and of course he had a go back and I wasn't very happy about it. And I had done no training as an observer or anything like that but anyway I still flew my missions. I had been there doing the serg [sergeant] major's work because I wouldn't fly as much as the bloke in front of me did and I

39:30 reckon the unit had to be looked after as well. 3 Battalion finished its tour of duty and went home and 9RAR came up, and the brigadier whom I had known came over one day and he said to me, "How are you going, serg major?"

40:00 I said, "Pretty good boss, not bad." And he said, "How would you like a soldier's job?" And I said, "I wouldn't, I am in a very comfortable position here, a nice safe one." He said, "I am sorry, you had better pack your bags," and I said, "Why?" And he said, "You are going back to infantry." I said, "Come on, come on," and he said, "No, 9 Battalion is coming up without a serg major and we need one." I said, "All right." He left and my boss was out flying

40:30 and then 9 Battalion's boss came up, whom I had known previously, and he greeted me like a long lost son and he said, "I believe you are coming to the battalion, serg major?" And I said, "Not if I can help it," and he said, "You are coming." My boss got back and I told him about it, and I had given him a hard time over a couple of things so he was rather pleased to see me go, I think.

41:00 The brigadier come along and said, "Come on, throw your bags in serg major, you are holding up a war." He gave me a ride across to 9 Battalion where I met the RSM who I had known of many years before, and I met a couple of officers I had known earlier in the piece and I became the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] of D Company 9RAR.

Tape 11

00:31 **Where was 9 Battalion based?**

The whole Australian Task Force as it was called was in a made area called Nui Dat. Nui Dat was placed on old Michelin Rubber Plantations. It had one hill in it which was not under rubber at any time and

01:00 that was called SAS Hill, and that is where the SAS… And the SAS are always based on their own. Other than that you had the battalions around the outside, all in permanent bases which consisted of tents with sandbags around the side. In the centre or near the centre of each battalion, 3

01:30 followed by 9 Battalion had a big pad, a big helicopter pad, and they had a runway about six thousand feet or seven thousand feet of runway on the Luscombe Field which was used by aviation, visiting aircraft and troop movements and all that. 1RAR had

02:00 their helipad and I don't think 2/4 or that battalion position had a pad, I am not sure. When I am talking of a helicopter pad for these when a battalion of round figures eight hundred to nine hundred men were lifted to go in the bush a hundred helicopters just came, sat down, and we were all running got on a helicopter and

02:30 a hundred helicopters just went shoo. You have never seen anything like it.

The noise must have been…?

It is and I went to 9RAR and my boss, the major, his father used to be the quartermaster of 3 Battalion when we came home from Korea and was stationed at Ingleburn, and he used to run the sidelines of the rugby matches as a boy. So it was great to see him and we got on very well together.

03:00 The RSM I had known of before, and a number of officers I had known and a number of warrant officers and senior NCOs I had known before so I wasn't all that much a stranger. But the big thing I felt was that I had done no training with these people and I didn't know them, and I felt put out that I had been brought in over the top of their

03:30 senior sergeant who should have been made up. I felt he should have been made up because he was a Korean veteran and a very experienced sergeant and a damn good sergeant. I could never understand why they brought me in over the top of him. But I never experienced any animosity or anything like that and had nothing but the best cooperation out of him and we got on very well together, and when we

04:00 weren't in the bush and in our little nest together we used to enjoy a beer together. I settled in there and we got settled down. When I was with 161 my personal weapon was a 9 mm pistol so that wasn't any good. I had to leave that behind and I came on and had to have instruction on the new

04:30 M16, the Armalite, so I had an Armalite. Around the camp the boss put on a couple of very small exercises in the camp for me to learn how he liked his company headquarters to move, what my duties were in the company headquarters, and so welded me into the mob. We

05:00 were on the ground with them for just over a week and we were going on our first operation, which they said was a nursery operation. That was the first time I had really experienced this helicopter business and I am still not quite sure who works it out, whether it is at battalion level or not. I think it must be.

05:30 But the boss came out in as far as the company headquarters was concerned, we were in this chalk as they called it, and right through the company we were on the chalk and you are given a helicopter number. You are taken up to the helicopter pad and put in an appropriate position along the side of the helicopter pad. Then you hear this roar coming.

06:00 You would lift at least eight hundred or more men in the deal and they all come in lines and they all set down at the same time, and you see your helicopter number and on the command when they are on the ground you all run – everything is done to the run – and you get into the helicopter. Around about

06:30 nine people all rationed and armed get on the helicopter and you sit on floor. Then a word must go through and they all lift together. You have got those carrying the blokes, they are the Slicks. Around them are the gun ships and they are these Cobras and all these type of things and they have got machine guns bristling everywhere, and

07:00 they fly out side of you and below and behind you but you can't see them, of course. And above you, you have fixed-wing aircraft all around the place, I don't know what they are supposed to do. I don't know whether Charlie is supposed to get. In this operation we were landed and that means the Americans over the years built these great firestone trails and

07:30 they would cut swathes through the jungle everywhere and ploughed so much of it, the theory being that they would see people's tracks as they walked across the ploughed ground because they can't fly, but that was all right. But then they allowed grass to grow and scrub to grow and all this type of thing so they were virtually useless. Anyway we relieved a company of 1RAR and I knew the CSM from years

08:00 before and I said to him "How is it?" He said, "We have been through here and we have combed it and there is nothing here, Syd. It is quite simple. You should have a comfortable week," or whatever it was we were going in, ten days, that's right. He said, "You should have a comfortable time." They took off and there we are out in the middle of nowhere and we set off on our patrol. We had

08:30 not gone all that long and by the time we got out there it was a bit after lunch and by the time we shook out and got going and we came across this track crossing the firestone trail and the boss said, "Well we won't push it today and there is nothing about, so what we will do, we will ambush this track, our company, and we will spend the night here and we will talk it out tonight

09:00 which way we are going to go and what we are going to do," because we had an area of operations

which we could work because we had the other companies on left and right. So we put the platoons in ambush, there were two tracks in fact, and we put two platoons on one track and a platoon and company headquarters on the other track. We got settled down and lo and behold it was on.

09:30 Charlie came in and we had a firefight and that lasted about an hour because he stood and fought for a while.

Came in on your track?

He came in on the ambush, he came in on both tracks and they used to make their own. Charlie used to make their own. Charlie, I never saw a brought torch, as you call it. They used to make a bit of bulb and they would put tape around batteries and make their own little torch, and

10:00 these came down and both ambushes were sprung and it was on, and he stood and fought for a little while. In the light of the dawn our ambush got four and the other ambush got five, and thankfully Charlie ran away from the other one and this bloke with an M79, which is a thing like a

10:30 shotgun which fires a small grenade, fired and the damn thing never went off. It bounced off a tree and went into our area and landed on the ground and we found it next morning. Thank God it never went off. So we had to have words with him about firing indiscriminately and how dangerous it could be. Anyway we cleaned up after that and as the CSM it was my job to search the bodies and take everything off them

11:00 and catalogue it and bury the bodies and mark the graves and then move on. We went up this track and it was on again and seven days and two hundred bunkers later D Company walked out, so I had words to Keith Everley about that afterwards.

11:30 And 9 Battalion became known as the bunker battalion because everywhere they sent us we seemed to run into bunkers. You would run into a bunker complex, have your fight and clear it, and you went with what you call a splinter team, which was two engineers, a corporal and a private, and they used to take it in turns and I reckon they were mad but they used to put a rope

12:00 around their waist and take a 9 mm pistol and a torch, and they used to go down these tunnels and the rope used to, pull the rope back and that is how they used to find their way out. And these blokes used to search the tunnels and one said to me one day, “Do you want to go down, serg major?” And I said, “I will go down for a look.” I think I got down twice my length and I come back out again and there is no room. I don’t know what would happen to your eardrums if you fired a pistol down there or anything

12:30 but these blokes were used to do it. Once they declared it clear they used to then order in explosives, and they used to set explosives right through the thing and blow the whole complex and destroy the complex and we would go on again. That was it. And anyway we pulled out of that and we took a few casualties,

13:00 the other companies took casualties, and we got back to… We finished the operation and we got back to Nui Dat and we settled down again and then we went into the bush, went back in and come up for another operation because you never got much rest. And we went back in again and

13:30 lo and behold, this time it was a dreadful name, they told us but this time we were going in and it was going to be a hot insertion. We thought, “Oh, that is great.” The connotations soldiers put on that is dreadful, but however that was it. That meant that the piece of ground that you are going on Charlie owned, and they couldn’t guarantee the safety of the helicopters to land.

14:00 So the idea is that the helicopter hovers at three to five feet, that’s what they say, and you leap out. That is all right but a helicopter who is under fire and the lalang, or the grass, in World War II they used to call it kunai grass, grows and burns like anything and the artillery fire would set all that on fire. So here we are descending through this

14:30 down to leap out and I swear to this day he was twenty feet, and with this big pack on your back you leap out. Of course you hit the ground and stop and the pack is still coming and whack and down you go and you have to get yourself up, and Charlie was there and a bit of a firefight developed and so that was our second operation.

15:00 We moved off the cover, off the pad and into the bush and lo and behold before we could get into the bush they dropped us right on the edge of a bunker complex. So we were into it again. And we did the first day and the second day, and word came from the battalion that we were to break contact and go and

15:30 make our way to a rest place if we could find one. We had taken a couple of casualties, the other companies had taken casualties, and we were told that questions were being asked in the [Parliament] House in Australia about the readiness of 9 Battalion for operations because of the number of casualties we had – not all dead, but we had quite a few casualties.

16:00 And we found this place, it was a stream which split and it had a little island on it and it was covered in light bamboo, and in nothing flat the diggers had hammocks and God knows what. We were at home, we were on the Riviera in nothing flat and it was great. We spent a bit of time there and the CO came in and explained the situation. I don’t know what

16:30 the questions were or anything about it but we stayed there a couple of days, enough time to get re-rationed and then we were into bunkers again. It appears with the benefit of hindsight the area that 9 Battalion was allocated was a rather famous

17:00 NVA [North Vietnamese Army] regiment called D445 and we were allocated the headquarters area of D445 regiment and consequently their top brass and this sort of stuff were there and they weren't very happy about us being there so we got a fight every time we were out.

Those two operations from where you were dropped right near their bunkers, how

17:30 **frustrating was that for you guys?**

I don't know if you would call it frustrating. I know it was damn uncomfortable because you are into the heat of the fires and the smoke and the ash, and the helicopters are making a roar and a hell of a bellow, and you are trying to gather your troops together in some semblance of formation and you have got these angry cracks going past your ears, and you are trying to settle down and get on with the job and he doesn't want you to

18:00 do that. It is damn uncomfortable for awhile. You get yourself shaken out and we had a couple of, my company had one and just over from us another company had another where blokes had not been hit but had damaged a leg with this big jump, and of course and they were casualties that had to be looked after and they are a burden on you. You can't leave him, you've got to get him out of there, so it is a fairly uncomfortable situation

18:30 for a short while. To find out that you are confronted with bunkers again, and we worked out our sort of battle plan how we would deal with bunkers to get inside the field of fire and get stuff in, get the 79s in where they could fire into the entrances. We had another weapon, which is a store-bought anti-tank weapon, but it was called an M66 and

19:00 you undo a strap and all that and pull it and all things spring up everywhere, and you have got a tube and you fire a little rocket out of it, an electrically operated rocket, and they are okay but you have to get into position to use them and all that because in the jungle these little bunkers are not easy to see. They dig a hole and then they revet all inside and put the dirt over the top,

19:30 and it is about that high and the hole goes down and trying to get your head around a tree when someone is firing at you to have a look at it and things like that, it is a bit hard to see where to get these weapons in to do it. We worked out a way that was our standard operating procedure as it were, that this one would try to nail this while this one got in and things like that. And it is not always because of the way you

20:00 travel and deploy, it is not always the leading platoon that hits the bunker. It could be company headquarters and I didn't like that either. You have quite an interesting time when it is on.

What was your response when you were questioned that the 9 Battalion weren't ready?

I hadn't done any training with them and all that and all you see is the fellows doing the job on the ground at the time and you think they are not doing a bad job,

20:30 but the people who didn't know any better, all they took notice of was that 9RAR had a significant number of casualties and they questioned the readiness for operations. I don't think in the first instance that any battalion is ever ready for operations. Green troops always fight differently to seasoned troops and that is just a fact of life, and it takes them awhile to become battle

21:00 hardened and used to noise and working under duress and things like that, and it all takes a bit of time and we were in for it right from the start. We did that and then we went back in and we went into more bunkers, and then on another day still in the same operation

21:30 the boss, we were in the company headquarters and one of the platoons said, "We are getting low on ammunition. Can you give us some ammunition out of the company headquarters?" And the boss said, "How are we going for ammunition, CSM?" And I said, "We haven't been involved so I can get ammunition off the fellows and take down and so much." I can't remember the figures. And, "I can take so much ammunition per man and

22:00 take that down to them." He said, "All right." So I gathered some blokes up and we collected some ammunition and we set off. It wasn't far, it was only about fifty to eighty yards, might have been a hundred yards, if that, and twice Charlie had a go at us on the way there. We weren't very happy about that. But we got in to the platoon and gave them the extra ammunition

22:30 and they had a bloke that had been hit in the upper arm here, and the platoon commander said, "Will you take him back with you, CSM?" So I said, "I will take him," and we were going back and where we were based or hootchied up there was this sort of natural track about five or six feet wide

23:00 and they yelled out to us, "Careful crossing the track, there are snipers around and there is a sniper somewhere in the trees, so be careful about it." We said, "All right." So what I did was split my blokes up and said, "Right-oh, you four get there and on the word just go like the clappers, don't worry about

it.” I told the boss what I was doing and he said, “All right.” So they went

23:30 and nothing happened. And then I lined another four up and one bloke jibed and the other three went. There was another four of us left there and one of them was a Bren gunner and so I said, “As soon as we can, we are ready, we will go.” And we started to go

24:00 and he fell over, and I went back to get him and he got up and took off like a bloody hare, which left me on the wrong side of the track on my own. And I said, “This is not real good.” And this sniper, he settled in on me then and he let a couple of rounds go. I don’t think he knew exactly where I was and I was saying to the boss, “Can you pinpoint this fellow? He is giving me

24:30 a bit of a hard time,” and he said, “We will try.” Eventually we got the direction it was coming from and he said, “When I count to three, CSM, we will all open up in that direction and you make a bee line for it,” and I so I said, “All right.” So that occurred and I got in. When I got in this little hollow in the ground where he was, he leant over and said, “Well done, CSM,” and all of a sudden, dah, dah, dah, dah, about that far above his head in a big tree

25:00 was this little bloke. And he threw himself on the ground and he used to smoke cigars and he crushed his cigar and he got up my ribs for ruining his cigar and I wasn’t very pleased about that either. But anyway that was my closest experience, I think. And we did a couple more. I did another operation which was much the same vein and

25:30 we were in the position at night and I was D Company, and our A Company was over on our right and Charlie hit them in strength at night. I think they lost four or five that night and that was my one and only experience of what we called spooky. There were two versions of that, one was a Hercules and they have three cannons down the left-hand

26:00 side, and the other version was a DC3 and they had three of these Vulcan machine guns. A Vulcan has got a number of barrels and the barrels rotate around the firing mechanism and they are capable of putting out around three thousand rounds per minute, and

26:30 these aircraft have got them and they are at a set angle, and the aircraft has got a chute in the bottom of it and they have one bloke just throwing out flares, and each flares burns at two million candlepower. These blokes do a rate one turn and I think that is a thirty degrees bank, and he just goes round in a circle at a thirty degree bank and then they fire these three guns, so you have got ninety thousand

27:00 rounds a minute coming out. This A Company got hit and there were two spookies came over and it just looks like red water, how you do this, and you just see this red stream and they don’t go rat a tat a tat, they go growl, growl, and that is a thousand more rounds gone at a time. They hit Charlie with that.

27:30 The next morning we were sent over to try and assist the company and see what had happened because Charlie had gone. It was just like you had walked into a forest that had experienced a particularly heavy big hail storm, branches that big, just chopped off the trees and dropped, and there were just stumps of trees the way these cannons had… And some of the Charlie were still laying there of course. They were

28:00 awfully mangled and hit with these .5 cannon things and they had been devastated. They must have got the main force or something like that. And A Company lost four or five blokes that night and that was my experience with that and it was my only experience with it.

Did you come across any of them that were still alive?

No, no, the only thing

28:30 in that vein, in a way it was quite hilarious, I thought it was, it is black humour. We’d had a contact and we set fire… And in the contact the grass set fire because the jungle in Vietnam gets very dry, and we had this contact and we had a fight, and when you have a fight and all that and you win, of course you go through and you yell out if you found anything, “I found one, sir.”

29:00 And this bloke who was walking along and I was in the back, and this bloke said, “I have got one, CSM,” and I said, “Is he alive?” Bang, “No.” I said to the boss, “What are you going to do about that?” And he said, “Nothing.” So the bloke wouldn’t have lived anyway, he was badly shot up and he must have moved and this kid just shot him.

29:30 In this one they were terribly mangled and things like that. And the other experience I had, which is possibly a bit unique, we were told to go to this map position and we went there and we sat and it was on a rise, there wasn’t many big hills there, but we were on a rise and the B52s used to come over, and there were normally three of them, one behind the other,

30:00 or in a V or line abreast. I don’t know who or why they worked that out. And they used to carry so many thousand pounds of bombs and most of them were a special bomb, and it was supersonic and it used to penetrate… In Vietnam there was very little rock; it was all dirt. Apparently they have got about sixty feet of soil, that is why Charlie could tunnel so well.

30:30 And apparently these things were going so fast that they would penetrate about twenty feet before they went off. They used to range from I believe two hundred and fifty kilograms up to a thousand kilograms

a bomb. Never saw one or anything, but once a B52 strike started it just used to go on. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom… And

31:00 you were never close enough because they used to move you out of the area. Then you got the lovely job of doing bomb damage assessment, or BDA assessment, and you had to go into this target area and assess the damage. Well it was utter devastation. There were trees broken and holes every which way. And there was no

31:30 shade or anything so you are under the hot sun and you are slipping and sliding over these things and you put your foot on something and you are liable to disappear twenty feet into a crater. And we all used to carry a toggle rope, which is nine feet of rope with a little wooden handle on one end with a loop at the other, and you could loop these together and make a long rope. Time out of number you were pulling someone out from these holes to assess

32:00 what damage is done to the enemy. And it was a complete waste of time. On a couple of occasions we found a body part, one we think a man's hand, Vietnamese, they are very small. It could have been a woman's hand, I don't know, but it was a day or so old by the time we marched in and found it. You have got no idea what is underneath all this because the leaves are still green and they haven't had time

32:30 to die or anything like that, and it is an impossible task to do and it covers hundreds of acres, and you are in there trying to make an assessment of the damage they have done – well you haven't got a hope. They say, "Was the target destroyed?" And you say, "Yes," but you don't know what the target was or anything like that. I did one of those and I was very glad to get out of that because I had never been on such a useless job in all my life.

33:00 It is complete and utter devastation when they do that. They would bomb from ten thousand feet so the bombs are supersonic by the time they hit the ground. That was pretty much Vietnam. And when my time came up I came home by aeroplane. I come home on an American R&R [Rest and Recreation] flight with World Airways.

33:30 And I had the experience, we were living in Brisbane, we were living at Chermside, and I got off this flight and went through customs, etc. I come home once before I come home for R&R and was able to be home for our wedding anniversary and then I went back again, and I got through customs and got through the RTO, which is the transport officer, and

34:00 I gave them my ticket and they said I had to go, I think it was TAA [Trans Australian Airlines] we were flying. And I had nothing to do so I bought a paper and I am sitting there and I am reading my paper. This bloke came over and said, "G'day dig, how are you?" I said, "Not bad." He said, "Where are you posted?" And I said, "Well in fact at the moment nowhere. I am just on my way home from Vietnam."

34:30 He said, "You murdering bastard." I said, "Thanks very much," and got up and walked away. And then I got on the flight and came home and my wife and kids were there to meet me. So I had leave and I reported back to Amberley, and I got home in the March and I had to wait until the January

35:00 so it was just travel to Amberley each day. And I joined the car club and we used to travel to Amberley each day, and in the January I went to Sale. I did the six months air traffic control course there with the RAAF and I qualified for that, and then I came back to Amberley and I was checked out on the

35:30 control tower there and then I started shift work at Amberley. I used to work twenty-four hours on, forty-eight hours off, and I was doing that and one of the officers came one day and said, "Listen, would you come to Oakey with the original mob, air traffic controllers?" I said, "Yeah," and he said, "We will have you. Will you become the flight planning officer and the weather officer

36:00 and give away the active controlling?" And I said, "That will do me, no shift work, no nothing." I came to Oakey and we opened the air space, the original air space here, and that was a bit primitive. We had a little, I suppose it would be three by three box, smaller than a country dunny [toilet] and about fifteen feet in the air, and when you wanted to tell the

36:30 aircraft what wind was blowing we had a little handheld anemometer and we used to stick it out the window and tell him what the wind was.

Very high tech!

Oh, very high tech. And we just had military radios there so we began air traffic control at Oakey. We lived in tin buildings. They were just corrugated, they weren't

37:00 the normal corrugation but they were unlined metal, and in winter Oakey's temperatures, my coldest out there was –6, I used to do the weather there. Part of your air traffic control course you are trained in weather observation and so it was authentic at –6, was my coldest. I did that for a while and then they said, "This is a joint user field," that's

37:30 both civil and military so then I had to go to Brisbane to DCA [Department of Civil Aviation] with a stack of RAAF people. There were two of us went to Brisbane and we did our training there and then we did a stint in the old Brisbane tower before the new one was built. And we went to Rockhampton and did two months training up there and I came back to

38:00 Oakey as a fully qualified air traffic controller, where I stayed there. And then my predecessor, he got out as he had enough so they said would I become the RSM of the army aviation centre, and I said I would, so I was promoted to warrant officer class 1. And I did two years there and they said to me,

38:30 “Well with your length of service you are very senior. You can’t sit here all day because you are blocking everybody else. What are you going to do?” I asked what was available and they offered me sergeant major of the… They reorganised the army into operational command, logistic command and what was the other one? Operational, ops, command, logistic command and one other, I can’t remember what they called it.

39:00 Administrative command, that’s right. I said, they offered me operational command RSM and I said, “What would I have to do?” And virtually it boiled down to the fact that you would be a show pony because I had a few ribbons on my chest and I would follow the general wherever he went and I

39:30 would be a little puppy dog, just following him around on all ceremonials and things like that. The job was at Victoria Barracks in Sydney and the accommodation was at Holsworthy, which is situated between Liverpool and East Hills, full of immigrant families and every time they spit it bounces, and my country bred kids here they wouldn’t have lasted five minutes.

40:00 So I said, “What follows sergeant major operational command?” They said, “You can go to CMF,” and I said, “No.” So I decided I would take my discharge so at the end of my engagement I took my discharge and became mister.

Tape 12

00:32 **If I can just back up, when you first went to Vietnam with the army aviation, what aircraft were being used in army aviation?**

We had the Cessna 180, only a small fixed wing, had six of those and six of the Bell 47, which was the Sioux, just a flying bedstead with a plastic bubble on the front. Whilst I was there in 161 we had a fellow

01:00 came up with the name of, he got killed, Barry Donald, very fitness oriented bloke and I had an amazing experience with him. He said to me, “Listen serg major, can you help me?” He said, “I have only just taken over as fixed wing but we don’t do any night operations and these blokes are running all over.” So we got into trouble with the firies [firefighters]

01:30 because we hooked up an aircraft flare on a rubber tree and let it go to see how long it would burn and we timed that, and the next thing the fireman came up in his jeep and called us all the idiots under the sun. He was a corporal, this bloke was a captain and I was a warrant officer but that didn’t stop him, he really got stuck into us because we hadn’t let him know. We did the timing and I said, “How about you get half a dozen of these

02:00 and what we will do we will take off and we will be the flare dropper.” We had another pilot behind us in the Cessna and another pilot who subsequently got killed in a care flight helicopter just north of Brisbane, and a helicopter and that is it, and they can be the gun ships. They worked out that the Cessnas could fire four rockets and the helicopter could have the M60, so this was beaut.

02:30 So how are we going to do this? He worked it out that he would fly from the left-hand seat, I would sit in the back seat and we would fasten the flares to the hold fast in the floor, and I would on his command just throw a flare out, its own weight would set it to go and that would be it. We went over this idea and, “Yeah, that is good.”

03:00 We don’t know how it happened but we get up and it is dark and we have no door on, and I am sitting in the back seat and the other pair are behind us and he said, “Are you right?” “Yes.” Pick it up, throw, so I threw it and away it went and we are watching that and we hear pop, the second one went off in the cabin. Panic reigned supreme and all he could say was,

03:30 “Throw the so and so thing out.” And I was in my harness and couldn’t get at it. The only way to do it was I took the harness off and leant forward to get the thing out and he tipped the thing on its side. Well they all rolled out and I am in the doorway and he has got me by the belt and I am telling the good Lord all about it and he is yelling, “Get back inside, get back inside.”

04:00 Eventually he got the plane righted and I fell back inside. I wasn’t really out and the blessed lit one had hung on the tail, so the thing is to try and get that. Well that Cessna performed some very unprescribed blooming antics and the fellow at the back was saying, “It is still there.” And he was saying, “I know the so and so is thing is still there.” Eventually it went and

04:30 he said, “That is that. We had better go back to camp.” Then we hear this knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock and, “What is that?” “I don’t know.” So we are talking about it all the way back. He said, “Right-oh, when I get down…” Everything is flying all right.” He said, “When I get down I want you, when I say, ‘Right,’ you jump out and roll away and I will stop as soon as I can.” I said, “All right.”

05:00 So we got down and I jumped out and stunned all my arm and the side of my head and God knows what, and I got up and by this time he had stopped the aircraft and turned the engine off and came out. And on the aircraft the radio aerial comes out of the nose and there is a stand off about that long and it goes along under. We had broken that stand off and it was flapping against the fuselage and that is what the big knock, knock was. We just sort of collapsed with…

05:30 They wouldn't let us try it any more but it is a night I will never forget. He and I got on very well and I went to 9RAR and they had the very first Pilatus Porter there, but it hadn't been assembled and they were assembling it and got it assembled. And by this time I was in 9RAR

06:00 and he and a fellow called Bob Jelly, a helicopter pilot, took it up on a test flight and were shot down and both killed. That was a bit sad that because he was very keen and a very good bloke and a hell of a good pilot and nice bloke to go with it. That is the type of aircraft we used, that type of thing. They used to mainly fly reconnaissance, and

06:30 convoy cover is reconnaissance, and a battalion commander used to get a helicopter to fly him around his companies and look at how the various battles were going and fall a shot of artillery and all that type of stuff.

Did they use them for forward observing as well?

Yes, oh yes, that was one of their main roles if necessary. When you were flying that is what I used to find a bit hair raising that an artillery firing from there and landing there and

07:00 you are flying underneath, and all the time that happened. They used to do forward shots and that kind of thing and guide people. In the jungle in the heat of the moment it is a bit easy to get disoriented, and quite often people will ask for a fix, where they are, and they say, "I am going to fly off east or west," or something like that

07:30 and then they know where they are, which direction is north, and they do a lot of air assistance.

Before you went to Vietnam, had any of the blokes and yourself done any training with helicopters at all?

Well I hadn't, no, and I had this as one of my bitches that I hadn't done any observer training or anything like that and they said, "You can be an observer. You can look out and see as well as I can." So I don't know if there was. They later on conducted an observer's course

08:00 but by that time I was RSM and it was conducted here in Australia. But I don't know what benefit it was to have an observer but we used to just sit in the left-hand seat and the pilot in the right, and we used to sit there with a loaded M60 and spray it with gay abandonment at anything you saw. We had the case where they went down and they were inspecting an artillery shell and this bloke fired at it and luckily hit it and the damn thing nearly brought the aircraft down.

08:30 There was a lot to be desired in it but we were in our infancy and those little aircraft were never ever designed for war anyway, but they used them quite effectively. They lost a few up there knocked down with small arms fire, but they only lost Constable, McDonald and Jelly.

Did you see any helicopters being used in Korea?

Very few, very few.

09:00 We had one come into the battalion one day and I think that is what they called the Westland, but it was a Yankee one where the pilot used to sit up there and the cargo cabin was down underneath. And these little Bell 47s, they used them for casualty evacuations, the serious ones, and they were very good. In Vietnam they used to use the

09:30 Hueys for dust-offs [medical evacuations] and that, and the American dust-off pilot safety was secondary to him. They were mad and they would do anything to get a bloke out, they really would. The other thing they used to use, we used to call them the Flying Crane, other than the Russian one, it is a big one and they used to have portable operating theatres they would cart from point A to point B, telecommunications officers and all that type of thing,

10:00 and the other one was two rotors. I did a visit and we did a cordon of Bien Hoa, which at the time was the second busiest airfield in the world, and they had a separate control tower and helipad for helicopters. The controller used to do two hours a day and you could wring him out like a dishcloth.

10:30 They were that busy, they used to do a movement like something like every twelve seconds. And you would see every kind of aeroplane that you could imagine there because you had so many civilian agencies flying around Vietnam and they would use European aircraft and American aircraft, whatever.

Was there any discussion at the time about who would operate the Iroquois and the Chinooks?

That was a long

11:00 standing one. The air force to my mind has always resented the army, this is the Australian air force, has always resented the army going into aviation. It has always been our experience, even going back to

Malaya with the British air force, you had to have a special radio

11:30 to communicate with their aircraft and then we were then operating with the Hunter jets and all that, which I think was the first British aircraft to break the sound barrier, it is too fast and you had to have a contact point and all that, and by the time you got into the contact point and pointed out the target he was gone. They were useless to you. And most RAAF pilots know how to get into an aeroplane, fly it and fight, but they don't know anything about the battlefield

12:00 and that. This goes a lot for our own blokes. In my time in Vietnam there was a hell of a lot of criticism thrown at our 9 Squadron being operated by the air force because they were more interested in maintenance and looking nice than flying the blessed aircraft in operations. We had 9 Squadron in

12:30 Malaya for some time on our second tour and the things we used them for there we found them pretty good. In Malaya they just didn't seem to want to be there. They wanted to be down there keeping their aircraft.

In Vietnam?

In Vietnam, they wanted to be there having their aircraft nicely polished and looking clean and the maintenance records up to date, whereas the Yankee pilot would be flying with a big cigar in his mouth looking out the window

13:00 and quite often with not a flying helmet on a cap on. He'd have nothing on or some greasy looking cap and, "Good day, Aus," and it was totally different atmosphere. When it came to getting helicopter gun ship support they just seemed to be more willing, and a lot of people did criticise 9 Squadron because of that.

13:30 Then the battle raged back here in Australia., The army is saying, "You don't know anything about battlefields," and they are saying, "You don't know anything about aircraft." And we said, "You come and learn about battlefields," and they said they don't want to, they are air force. And that is how it goes. I think the air force generally shouldn't have helicopters. Let them get up and do air fighting,

14:00 and things in and around the battlefield let the army do it.

Would that air force over-protectiveness of their aircraft be primarily because Australia just couldn't afford to waste aircraft like the Yanks do?

No, I think it is the way they are brought up. Most people will tell you, and I am not in a position to say it is categorical is true, but most people will tell you that our aircraft are over maintained. Whether there is a degree of truth in it or not is for

14:30 people with more knowledge to argue, but I have heard it time and time again that our aircraft are over maintained. Because whether an aircraft is one year old or ten years old you get in it and it is in perfect condition the whole time. That battle, I believe the air force is still not happy about us having helicopters. I believe it raised its ugly head after that big Black Hawk accident in Townsville

15:00 and I think the battle will rage for ever and a day.

How did you get to Vietnam, right in the beginning, did you fly?

Yes.

You landed at?

Straight through, yeah, Ton San Nhut..

What did you think when you got off the plane there?

Just overwhelmed. You have never seen air power or power like it. One of the operations

15:30 I did with 9RAR, the Tet offensive, or '69, just before I come home, they used to call it the Golden Circle because if what I was told and you can believe, the Yanks had something like forty thousand troops of all kinds in Bien Hoa, and this side would be getting rocketed and that side would be

16:00 holding a dance. And they used to hold dances there because the Yanks have a lot of servicewomen in Vietnam. And to stop Charlie attacking it they just used to ring it with troops. And Ton San Nhut had the same and Bien Hoa and Da Nang, they used to have three of these spookies, one at twelve, one at eight and one at four, and they used to make that position in a circle,

16:30 all night dropping flares, and that was from dusk to dawn, used to go all night. They used to ring it with troops and D Company 9, you most probably wouldn't ever remember it I don't suppose, but we got the outpost lookout job and we were out

17:00 like the proverbial sore thumb, and we were told no noise, no dust and everything, and just sit on this hill and observe. I said to the boss, "Well us being up here stuck out like a lily on the dunghill, what support have we got?" He outlined from eleven-inch Howitzers down to what they call dusters, which is a

17:30 40 mm twin Bofors cannon. We had sixteen batteries of artillery protecting roughly a hundred and ten blokes so support was just laid on ridiculously. While we were there I was in my hootchie and I heard voices, so I stuck my head out and it was our fire officer, who was in Kiwi army, and the boss, and they were talking

18:00 and I said, “What is going on?” And he said, “Look out there.” And Charlie was sending rockets in so this FO [Fire Officer] got on the blower and we brought the artillery down on them. They sent a patrol out next morning and there were graves but we didn’t dig them up, but a lot of blood trails and all that. And they brought back some rockets that they had got.

18:30 One of my blokes was going on leave on R&R and someone said, “Wouldn’t this be a beaut souvenir?” and they said, “Oh yeah, okay, how are we going to get it back to Nui Dat?” And this particular, “Don’t worry, sir. I will take it.” I said, “How are we going to do it?” He said, “What we can do is put it in a couple of hootchies and see how we go.” He said, “All right.” And the

19:00 Caribou aircraft, which were then known as Wallabies, he got down to Bien Hoa and got on a Wallaby and he is flying back to Nui Dat, and they only used to fly at about three thousand feet, it was fairly bumpy. And he said, “We are sitting there quietly and then all of a sudden the bloody thing rolled out from under my feet. And,” he said, “you should have seen the loadmaster,

19:30 he nearly had a baby on the spot.” And of course great panic and they threw it out of the aircraft. They charged him and the charge came back to 9 Battalion and it squashed, but we lost our souvenir and the air force wasn’t very happy about it. The Americans were overwhelming and

20:00 I went on a visit when I was with 161 to Bien Hoa and we got into the aircraft pattern and you land in your turn and I heard on it, “Bien Hoa, this is a certain call sign. I am calling an emergency, a pan pan pan.” And this bloke said, “You are number five in the emergency holding pattern.” In Australia

20:30 they shift heaven and earth and he said, “You are number five.” And so he just accepted that and continued to circle and then they tried to fit them in the landing stream. But with an aircraft movement of at least once every twelve to fifteen seconds there is not a lot of room to put them in. And they had left and right parallel runways and we were landing in the Cessna on the left-hand runway and landing and passing us was the formation of five Hercules landing

21:00 at the same time. These blokes are far too good for me. And they had a lot of the E5 aircraft, you name it, Phantoms, just so many. And it was completely overwhelming and it would take you much more than one tour in Vietnam to get used to the amount of power that was there.

By the time you landed at Ton San Nhut to get to Nui Dat, how long did that take?

21:30 They don’t call it the tarmac, they call it the ramp. You are on the ramp and you get off one and you are met by transport authority, and they took us over and you are straight onto a Wallaby and into the air. By aircraft that is only about twenty minutes flight, not all that far because Ton San Nhut is near Saigon.

22:00 **How well developed was Nui Dat when you got there?**

It is developed for what it was. We had gravel roads, all the camps were laid out with these four-man tents with sandbags around. Most of the messes, that is every soldiers’ mess with the exception of engineers, who lived like kings, consisted of a wooden frame, corrugated iron halfway up and the remainder was fly wire,

22:30 never fully enclosed because of the heat. Because of the road passing, crossing right on the end of the threshold of the airfield a tremendous amount of dust, this red dust pervaded everything. It was right through because every time an aircraft took off it would start at the threshold, and they could never get oil or anything down to stop the dirt blowing; it used to blow right back. And

23:00 24RAR had two companies of Kiwis and it was known as the Anzac Battalion, and those poor devils used to get that every time an aircraft took off. Especially something like a Wallaby or a Hercules, the little ones it wasn’t so bad. But when the rain come you are up to your backside in mud. But we weren’t as bad as the Yanks. We went into a rubber plantation when they went there and they left

23:30 the leaves on the ground and people walked on that. The Yanks wouldn’t do that, they would clear everything right back to bare earth and build their camp, and consequently they were up to their backsides in mud. Nui Dat was fully developed when I got there and with roads and all that, but it was never intended to be a permanent structure and it was only enough to keep people out of the weather, that is all.

24:00 **All the blokes mentioned that the smell and the heat when they got off the aeroplane, but obviously you had been to Malaya and Borneo, how did it compare to that?**

I think every eastern country has that smell. I don’t know what it is but it is just that eastern smell, and after a while you smell it and you take no notice of it. There is a different smell about it.

24:30 I don’t know what it is, it has got to be a combination of a million things but there is an eastern smell about everything. I didn’t find, and really I don’t think when you got off the plane originally at Ton San

Nhut I don't remember smelling it there because there is so much cement and tarmac and the heat coming off that as in any Asian airport, the heat

25:00 was tremendous coming off that. The hat stops the glare of the sun, the heat is coming back at you from the glare off the ground all the time and so I don't remember a smell at Ton San Nhut.

By the sound of the number of aircraft there would be more smell of aviation, wouldn't it?

Yes, I reckon so. There is a tremendous amount of aircraft moving from there and also Da Nang, which I never visited, and also Bien Hoa.

I asked you earlier about the difference in the Australian soldier in the field

25:30 **equipment wise from Malaya to Korea, how was it then changed from Malaya to Vietnam?**

In Vietnam we had basically the same green uniform, the same boots and gaiters, the bush hat, but we had gone onto the SLR [Self Loading Rifle], which is the Australian adaptation of the Belgium Fabrique Nationale, and

26:00 they also adopted the M16, which was the Armalite rifle. There was a modification to that which allowed the M79 to fit underneath so that you could give a couple with that and then let go with a small grenade. There was during the early '60s there was the phasing out of the Bren gun and

26:30 phasing in of the American M60, the light machine gun. We had the tanks, which when in 9RAR we used them once in my time. They were, when we had them they were of mixed value. Then we passed them to B Company, I think it was, and one got knocked out with an

27:00 RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade]. That was the weaponry change we did and other than that we kept very much to the Australian way. One of the drawbacks was when we wanted tank ammunition we couldn't order it from the Americans because they didn't use that weapon, so we had a magnificent ship called the Jeparit, which I never saw, but it used to bring canteen goods, ammunition, clothing,

27:30 everything we used was unique to the Australians, no-one else used it. The only thing we were able to use with the Americans was ammunition on the M16s and the 7.62, the tank ammunition, and both the machine gun and main armament were uniquely British and that was all we had. The 9 mm was able

28:00 but they were only base camp weapons. Transport units, the infantry units, the Australians had supposedly updated the Owen gun and they came out with the F1, and it was like a hip pocket in a singlet but it was okay and it wasn't much and I don't think it lasted long.

Did any of the patrols use shotguns?

No, I never saw one. SAS may

28:30 have used it but I would be inclined to think no because it would be too distinctive, and the ammunition would be too heavy and you would require too much of it because unlike Malaya a good firefight would occupy you for hours and it has not been unknown for companies to run out of ammunition, and to carry shotgun ammunition I don't think would be an effective way.

29:00 **The Wombat guns, how old were they at the time?**

They never went to Vietnam. They were British and it was an anti-tank weapon and it had two wheels and you used to tow it by the muzzle.

No, I am thinking of, is it the M79, the one that used to just fire a small grenade?

The M79. I first struck it in Vietnam. It is like a small shotgun and when I first got it, it was a single

29:30 shot, you broke it put your grenade in, closed it and fired it. It had no bore in it like a shotgun but they adapted to fit under the M16 so you could do it. It was a four-ounce grenade with a charge behind it so again by the time you had a dozen grenades on you it is a fair weight to carry by the end of the day. We used to carry Claymore mines for ambush purposes

30:00 but we never used to as infantryman, we never used to lay mines, well not in my experience anyway. One brilliant commander, he, we were about some miles from the coast and Charlie used to come down around us and go for R&R in Vung Tau and they said, "We will stop this," so he put this line of mines

30:30 down to the coast and he patrolled it with APC, or armoured personnel carriers, and Charlie used to wait for him to go past and pick them up and lay them where we would tread on them. And a tremendous number of our mine casualties were caused by our own mines where Charlie had stole them from us from this stupid-looking thing, and apparently he did it against all advice but it was done. They were generally, they are about the size of a tin of Kiwi boot polish.

31:00 And they were designed because someone woke up, really, and I think it was the Viet Cong or the Viet Minh fighting the French that brought out the theory, it is better to wound the bloke than kill him because if you kill him, they send him back and bury him and that is the end of it. If you wound him sufficiently it takes eight or ten people a hell of a lot of time

31:30 to treat him. So that was the way they worked – their main aim was to severely wound rather than kill. When you think of it economically it is not a bad theory if you can do it in large numbers.

What was the other weapon you were you going to tell me about when I asked you about the MOWBAT [Mobile Ordnance Weapon Towed]?

That was the BAT and the MOWBAT. The MOBAT had gone and then when I was in South Australia they brought in the American deal,

32:00 which was the 106 recoilless rifle, and theoretically you are supposed to be able to fire that off the back of a Land Rover. The theory was good but when they tried it all the rivets fell out of it. As with most of these, thirty per cent drives the rounds and seventy per cent counters the recoil,

32:30 and the blast out the back would be fifteen to twenty feet long. This great sheet of flame goes out the back and there is no way you can hide it. Theoretically you are supposed to be able to fire it out the back of a Land Rover and apparently the things fell off the Land Rover when they tried it so they gave that away. It was light enough for two men to wheel around. The stupid part of it was it had two handles and one wheel,

33:00 rather than two wheels and one handle, so two men had to grab a handle and lean against the thing and wheel it around like a wheelbarrow and the barrel sticking out there made it very unstable. I think that has even gone by the board now and they use more man pack things.

Did they have the Karl Gustavs?

That came in around about ’65 or ’66. That was 84 mm. That was a

33:30 good weapon, but too heavy to be lugging around all the time. But it was used in Vietnam to good effect when it was used as a bunker buster because of the shape charge and things like that.

Did they ever use the tanks for bunker busting?

They had them there for that purpose but I don’t think, well in the time we used them, or in the time I was there, we didn’t come upon bunkers. And

34:00 like tanks you have got to be careful of the troops, and the thing is do you have the troops behind the tanks or the troops in front of the tanks. If you are in front your troops are very exposed because they are worrying about this going on the trees crashing down behind them and the noise and all that, so the troops are worried there and they lose their effectiveness. If you put them behind the tankies get frightened because you can up an RPG as happened to B Company

34:30 and take one out. So they are a mixed blessing in jungle. The other thing they had the fifty calibre up top and all the vines and all that get around it, and in our experience one of the fifty calibre were torn off the top of the tank. “You have lost something,” and give him back his fifty calibre because it is only welded on and it has arms about that long, and they were crashing through it and they just tore the fifty cal off, so

35:00 they are a mixed blessing in jungle.

When you are with the tanks, how would you maintain communication with them?

Telephone in the back. Most tanks, and definitely the Centurion, have a little box in the back of the tank and you pull that out and wind it and it takes you straight through to the commander. It has got press to talk switch and you can get into trouble with the commander because he might be in the middle of a conversation or something

35:30 and you press and it buzzes in his ear and he has to switch to you. They accept that and you can talk to the tank from the safety of behind the tank.

What about when you were with 9RAR, did you do any stuff with the APCs?

They carried us a couple of times. When you get a sudden change, things come up that headquarters get a threat about want you to move very quickly and they move you and we had three.

36:00 I was going to tell you that when we got onto the Golden Circle. No noise or anything like that and we had got onto these people in the dark and they didn’t know what, the fire was coming out of Bien Hoa, they didn’t know where we were. The APCs were coming up to re-ration and re-water us and we weren’t happy about it, and they said, “They are just coming up here and they will fan out like they are observing and then they will go back the way they came,” but

36:30 keep them out. At the centre of this thing because of the dust and all that and this APC comes up and screws around and comes to a halt, and whose head pops out the top but Normie Rowe. He got a burst because he didn’t go where he was told and all that type of thing and a very chastened Normie had to slink down into his driver’s seat and go back off into the bush. But he was a good bloke, people liked him.

37:00 They carried us a couple of times and he was very quick to pull out the guitar and give the fellows a serenade and all that, and he was pretty popular amongst his own blokes too.

What about other entertainment troops that came up?

They came up from time to time and once a month, or once in six weeks. You would come out the bush say Friday and they would try to get you out in the morning. Friday afternoon you would make sure your weapons are all right

37:30 and everything like that, your equipment has been replaced and repaired and Saturday morning you'd go to Vung Tau and they had an R&R centre there, and that was by vehicle and that was a couple of hours' drive. You would get down there and they had more rules than Alcatraz and you could and you couldn't. And then they used to have these concert parties and

38:00 you would have a concert and then you would be rounding the diggers up making sure they were all back, and you would be back to Nui Dat that afternoon. Sleep at Nui Dat and re-ration that night and next morning you are on a chopper and back in the bush. We had one concert, I couldn't tell you the girl's name, but she sang scat, that type of stuff and

38:30 no-one understood what she was saying or anything like that and they wasn't much interested in her anyway, but she gave us a concert and they dutifully listened, and when they went to walk out we stopped them from going and things like that. And it lasted a bit over an hour but that is the only concert that I saw. They used to bring them up to Nui Dat but in my experience I never went to one at all.

39:00 When the big battle was being fought there was Col Joye and Little Pattie were performing in Nui Dat itself but I never saw a concert there.

Tape 13

00:33 **Blokes have told us that the majority of time whenever they went out patrolling it had already been patrolled by the SAS to just let them know what was to be expected, so was it a bit of a surprise that you kept coming up on these bunkers that hadn't been detected previously?**

Saying it had been patrolled by the SAS is one thing, because

01:00 I was very friendly with the CSM of SAS in 2 Squadron when it was there and I was very friendly because he had been to the same school as me. The OC and I had known him, he was older than me and I had known him as a kid in school days. And there was another bloke who had come through the ranks and was currently a lieutenant and I had known him before there.

01:30 The SAS used to get requirements from up above to say, "We want to know what is in that area," so the SAS would go in to gather that information, what they could find out there, and they never went out for any more than four to five days. They would go in there and admittedly they would patrol that area

02:00 and they would come back and I don't know what they would say, but they could say, "We have found stacks of Viet Cong, bunker systems, this, and so and so, and we found that." Then the powers that be would say, "That would be a bloody good place to put in an operation, wouldn't it, and knock some of this about." And so then you would go in and find the bunker systems. I don't think they, well the task force commander there

02:30 was there to do damage to the enemy and he'd say, "I got some SAS information that this is in there, and 9 Battalion, that is your job go in and sort it out." And they would submit their plans on what they are going to do and he would say, "Fair enough, let's go for it." Yes, you would go into a place very conceivably that had been previously patrolled by SAS. But SAS, even though they did, it was never their role to fight.

03:00 They were very pleased if they could get in get the information and get out not to fight because there is never enough of them on the ground. Besides that, if they get in there and have a fight the enemy knows that you know that you know they are there, so they may as well bug out because you have the option as in Vietnam of putting troops in or air strikes or B52 bombs and they don't know which one you are going to use.

03:30 **Did you feel that the intelligence that the SAS was gathering was actually getting down to you blokes? I mean you sounded surprised that you came across 200 bunkers.**

The fact, yes, but we were surprised that we were in so many bunkers over that period of time. But someone could have patrolled within twenty feet of them and not seen them and hit a bunker system over

04:00 that way that was not there. We just happened to walk into these that hadn't been found because it was supposed to be a nursery job. Anything that happens in the jungle really should not be ultimately a surprise because you can't see far, and if someone sits and watches you go past you have every chance

of not seeing them as seeing them. So whilst

04:30 it is a surprise, you can't denigrate the people who missed it because we could have left some to our left and right. You get a boundary between forces, well the boundary is usually inclusive to one and exclusive to another. You keep clear of the boundary because it happens you can run into your own troops if you get too close to the boundary so that little bit could contain exactly

05:00 what you are looking for. As they say in the trade, this is one of the reasons why engineers build roads that the infantry can march fifty metres from and parallel to so, that is how it goes and anything can happen.

The bunker systems were quite cleverly built, weren't they?

They were; they were quite ingenious. They are revetted with poles only about

05:30 say so round, they are only about four to six feet square with two entrances and these poles are put over the top, and they have vertical poles down holding the revetment back and this is all to tie their little hammocks to and things of such nature. They are very small people. And then they put the dirt back on top.

06:00 And they may have a little table on there and that is where they sit and they walk and it pads down until it is like cement. I have seen one hit with a 2.7 rocket and it was a direct hit and all it did was crack the roof and gave them inside a hell of a shock and concussed them to death, but it never destroyed the bunker. It is very solid,

06:30 such a low silhouette. And whenever he cuts a tree he will scrape a bit of dirt up it so the fresh cut doesn't show up. That is one of the giveaways. You will see all these stumps with dirt on and so you know there is a bunker around somewhere.

What was the method you had to approach these bunkers?

It depends on, the required approach, I will put it that way, by then

07:00 is concealed and he will even go, some of their bamboo is very quick growing and very difficult to move through so he will in fact plant bamboo on the required approach. He will make that as difficult for you to get through as he can. Normally you are restricted to one man, and fighting your way through at least one, sometimes two, zigzags to get through it.

07:30 You may come upon it from the required approach, you may come upon it from any other angle, and you have just got work out or see which way these entrances are facing because you have to try and get around the back of it because he has to stick his head up to do something with you. So it depends on which way you perceive the bunker to be facing,

08:00 and the way you want to go may have a sheer creek bank that you can't get up, or you have got to cross a creek which is open to get it. And the idea is the old fire and movement – one would put on the ground while the others move and fire until a bloke can get into such a position to get an M79 or an M76 or something going, and if you can destroy one bunker well then you have got a gap

08:30 which is mutually supporting in which you can get into another position and start doing it that way. You can never take the whole thing at one hit, you have got to try and get one to create your gap. And if you come back to the basic tactic of fire and movement and lines of approach and all that.

Once you have cleared out an area like that, would the B52s be presumably be sent in after you?

Not unless it is deemed to be worth it because it is very expensive thing,

09:00 but if they have intelligence from any source that there is a gathering of power, whether it be in numerical numbers or hierarchy or something, they will do it.

How far from Nui Dat where you when you bumped into the D445?

I suppose fifteen or twenty minutes helicopter flight. It was a fair way up.

09:30 It was due north towards Bien Hoa but I think we were out of Phuoc Tuy Province. The Australians were in Phuoc Tuy as they call it and I think we were beyond Phuoc Tuy Province, but it was a reasonable helicopter ride and I say it was a day's patrol walk. You are not walking very fast when you

10:00 patrolling so we would be a few miles from Nui Dat.

At that stage the Australian area of operations was pretty secure, wasn't it?

We had given him, the Australians had given him a very hard time in Phuoc Tuy because we… It comes back to this thing of the Australians that you patrol hard to dominate no-man's land, and it has been said and I never confirm or deny it that Charlie,

10:30 that when the Battle of Long Tan was fought, that was as a result of Charlie going to have a go at Nui

Dat but the patrolling got onto him before he got ready to get in there. That was the benefit of… And Australians always patrol very heavily and in Phuoc Tuy he could never settle down and say, “I am safe.” Because unlike the Yanks

11:00 we navigated with map and compass and counting steps and things like that, and the Yanks used to move along tracks, and that is why we weren’t ambushed very often. Very seldom were Australians ambushed and he never knew which way we would come because to get from point A to point B we just set a map and compass and all that we navigated our way and read the ground

11:30 where the Yanks would go by this track and that track. And they used to sit and wait for the Yanks and put mines down and things like that. He was never comfortable with us.

What was your perception of the American soldiers in Vietnam?

He had a ton of guts but he had no brains. You can’t say the Yank wasn’t prepared to fight but I never agreed with their tactics.

12:00 They used to spruik a lot of theory but it wasn’t evident to me in the bush. When we were in the bush at all times camouflaged, a bit of face camouflage and sleeves rolled down, all commands by signal unless you were close enough to talk lowly, all movements slow and deliberate, and always whatever

12:30 position you are in one bloke looks to the right and the other fellow looks to the left, right, left, so you cover all round. The Yanks used to wander along with the sleeves rolled up and shirts open. Once when we had to marry up, we had to marry up with these Yanks to tie up this Golden Circle around Bien Hoa, and we were in position and we were to marry up with these Yanks and this bloke said to me, “Hey, sir,” and I said, “What?” He said, “I

13:00 can hear music,” and I said, “You are bloody mad.” And he said, “No sir, I can hear music.” I couldn’t hear music. After awhile this other bloke said, “See he is right sir, I can hear music.” So I thought, “All right, we will listen.” And they both said, “Sir, we can hear music.” I went over to the boss and I said, “There is a couple of kids here reckon they can hear music,” and he got on the radio to

13:30 this Yank and he said, “Are you anywhere near our position?” He said, “Yes, I make it that we are five hundred metres from you.” So he said, “Go back and keep watch out.” I got back to these diggers and I said, “No-one stands up, stay where you are in your firing position and we will see what comes.” Within a minute or so there is the rustling in the bushes

14:00 and along comes this Yank, steel helmet uncamouflaged, shirt undone, dog tags glistening and he is jigging along and I said, “This is nice.” The bloke behind him was carrying his weapon that he could use it, the first bloke had his just across his shoulder, and he had his weapon in a position that he could use it, sleeves rolled up

14:30 and uncamouflaged helmet. And then came the machine gun, not the commander as with us, and the machine gunner had it across his shoulder and he had the radio and he was entertaining the troops with the radio. I went back to the boss and told him and he said, “Where are you?” I said, “We are about three hundred metres from your position,” so he said, “Get your patrol to halt

15:00 and stand where they are.” This bloke said, “Why?” He said, “Because my men are going to stand up.” And the way we were we had a platoon there, and they had walked right in front of a platoon and coming upon our company headquarters, and they were at least four hundred metres out in their map reading and according them they had another four hundred metres to go

15:30 and they were treating it like Pitt Street. And when we stood up you ought have seen the jaws hit the ground and all this type of thing, and they couldn’t get over the fact that they had walked past so many of our troops. And that is just basic, very basic jungle law that you don’t do anything like that. And the other troops said, “We knew they were coming because we could smell them.” We used to go easy on the toothpaste.

16:00 If you could talk a bloke into cleaning his teeth with salt, you used salt, you didn’t use toothpaste. You didn’t wash with soap because as in Malaya these blokes have been in the jungle so long they were like animals and they could smell any cosmetic smell a mile away. And that was one of the things that was reported and came back out of Vietnam time and time again from POWs [Prisoners of War]

16:30 taken by all nations. They could smell the hexamine that we used to cook our meals on and they knew we were close by when they could smell that, so they worked on getting odourless little cooking tablets. It looks like a flat square candle. It has got petrol or something and you can light it with a match and boil a billy of water and that. So the idea was to make that odourless because you would give away your position.

17:00 Odourless toothpaste should be on the shopping list. I don’t know whether there is one available. And odourless soap the same because if you have got cosmetics on you it goes for miles in the jungle. You can bear that out because when you use a smoke grenade for aircraft or anything… We finished up we developed an idea. We used to try and get a long stick

17:30 and tie the grenade to that and as soon as the aircraft called for smoke you would set it off and get it up as high as you could, because letting it off on the ground the smoke would waft laterally through the

jungle rather than going up through the canopy. If there is any delay that Charlie can get out of similar cover because he has smoke grenades and guide your aircraft away from him and onto you, so

18:00 you have all these things to do to make sure the right person sees the smoke at the same time at the right time. The Yanks used a lot of cosmetics and they chewed gum, spearmint and the peppermint, and so the diggers after a while in the bush they could smell them.

Obviously the training that the Aussies had was very good?

Yes. We have carried on from World War II and we have had, even though there wasn't a lot of activity,

18:30 the same lessons applied from Malaya to a large extent and our instructors carried that to Vietnam.

Even in Malay you had blokes that were up in New Guinea during World War II?

Yes and this is the thing that you cut down on the cosmetics. You keep yourself clean and disease free but you don't indulge in cosmetics, and you also reduce the amount of smoking because of the same thing. Although in Malaya and Vietnam

19:00 the enemy smoked, but if you get non smokers amongst them and he can smell cigarettes smoke he knows it someone other than his mates are around and they go looking for it.

Smoking is discouraged on patrols with the Australians?

Yes it is. Discourage smoking if you can but it was never a hard and fast rule, but while you were actively patrolling you wouldn't smoke but if you sat down for a breather then they can have a smoke, but not while you are moving because you are looking around

19:30 and not to create a fuss or anything, very slow stealthy movements while you are patrolling.

In that slow steady movements when patrolling how many kilometres could you travel in a day?

If you feel you have got a chance of running into something, not very many. I wouldn't put a figure on it, it is what you assess your threat as. If you feel the threat is low and you are pretty safe well

20:00 you would move a bit faster. If you get into an area that has been hit by bombing in the past or storms where it has been brought down and it has secondary growth, at times it is impenetrable and you have got to try and get through that. And in Malaya, we started in Malaya and we carried it into Vietnam, that you use secateurs, you don't use a machete. You tape the ends of the secateurs

20:30 instead of the click, click as you go through you just get a dull thud. It depends on so many factors, but you can never set out to say, "I am doing to do ten kilometres today," or five kilometres because circumstances may change at any time and you may get hard country to move in due to vegetation or the topography of the ground. You have just got to go with the flow.

What about the

21:00 **use of drugs by American soldiers, which is well documented. Did you ever come up against this?**

I didn't in my time. It wasn't until I got back to Oakey in conjunction with SIB [Special Investigations Branch] and provos and civilian police. I went with them at my own request and they allowed me to go. I took no actual part, I was an observer, and we raided a house

21:30 out at Goonbungee and we got two sergeants and about eight soldiers who were all subsequently discharged because they had bongs and they had everything there. A couple of them had rented this house and they were all smoking it out there. I think it was in its infancy. It was used in Vietnam I believe by the Yanks quite a bit but I never served with the Yanks

22:00 over there so I don't know, but I never struck it in 161 and I never struck it in 9RAR.

Most of the blokes we have spoken to who have been to Vietnam said there was a pretty heavy drinking culture.

That would depend on who you belonged to. Most probably telling tales out of school but I had a driver who was a bit of a villain. He used to come and say, "The grog is getting low, sir," and,

22:30 "Aircraft parts coming Vung Tau, put the Turner in the convoy?" "Right-oh, serg major." So this box would go down to Vung Tau suitably labelled 'Aircraft spares' or whatever, and he would put a pallet of grog underneath it and he would bring the thing back. You were governed to two cans of

23:00 beer per man perhaps while you are in Nui Dat. Now in 9RAR that was heavily policed and when you went to get your cans of beer over the bar, we had company canteens, the canteen manager had to open both cans, so therefore the drinking culture was very severely curtailed. Blokes used to give other blokes, non drinkers

23:30 would give their cans away and some blokes could get a bit more. If you were in an ordnance depot or the engineers or things like that there were that many lurks and perks where they could get it. And I remember coming back one night on a short patrol with 9RAR and we met the vehicles on the road, and we were coming in about the last two miles by vehicle

24:00 and at the checkpoint there is the brigadier, would you believe, of all people, checking bloody vehicles for grog. Never seen it before or since in my life but he was worried about it and it was policed very heavily. But if you belonged to the engineers, 161 to a degree, because we used to send down and get an extra pallet. But I used to police it to a degree and if I saw anyone getting a bit merry

24:30 or noisy I would say to the canteen, “So and so has had enough,” and I would tell the bloke, “You have had enough, now go to bed.” That was one of the reasons that I made my presence felt there. But they can have a few beers but in the main those soldiers were aircraft technicians and they had to be on the ball with what they were doing, and their boss, because they came under an

25:00 engineering officer and he used to say to me, “They are working hard. Give them a go.” Well I’d let them drink an extra two or three or four cans but I wouldn’t let them get motherless raving drunk and things like that.

The infantry guys being the absolute peak of their fitness, two cans wouldn’t have as much effect on them would it?

No. While I was in 161, this is again the base troops, we had a hundred and thirty, a

25:30 hundred and forty blokes and we had two projectors and movies every night of the week. You used to sit there and drink your beer and watch the movies. When I went to 9RAR seven or eight hundred blokes, they had one projector. It used to be in a company each night so when the reel finished you had to wait while the reel was changed, which we didn’t do in Vietnam, and you got two cans of beer if you didn’t get an influx from another

26:00 company who had got in and got two cans of beer off you. So you might only get one can or nothing, “Sorry, I have run out.” And they used to have to drink what we call a goffer, which is a can of soft drink, so you got a goffer instead of a beer. The base troops could get most things. When I first joined 9 I had a mate in ordnance and they said, “Wouldn’t it be great to get together and have a barbecue

26:30 and do something?” We went and saw the cooks and they said, “The steaks are not on the menu in that quantity,” so I went and saw an ordnance mate he said, “Yeah, I can help you. It is going to cost you a couple of cases of beer.” So I went back to 161and I said, “I know what goes on. I will buy a couple of cases of beer to be fair and if you don’t sell them to me I will tell on you.” I got my couple of cases of beer went back to ordnance

27:00 and gave him his two cases of beer and he gave me a case of fifty-five pound of steak, and I took it back to the company and we had a company barbecue. Wheels within wheels. So the base wallahs, of course there was a drinking culture because they had the wherewithal and the means to do it, but the poor little infantryman, he didn’t.

Was there resentment among the different corps in Nui Dat?

I think so. I know I hated the engineers with a passion because any engineer

27:30 task you couldn’t get done unless you paid beer on the black market for it. When I was in 161 I came out this day, or came round the corner and there is this little digger, an infantry bloke. I said, “Who the hell are you? What are you doing over here?” He said, “Sir, I am looking for someone to fix my radio.” And he had this little radio and I said, “Oh yes.” And he said,

28:00 “They tell me that the technician here will fix it here for you for a few quid.” I said, “Yes.” I didn’t know about this so I went and found the technician and he had a thriving business, watches and radios. If your little radio or your watch went bung, for an amount he would fix it for you in army time with army equipment. And

28:30 I curtailed that business and I made myself a bit unpopular there. If he had time to fix it he should do it for nothing because he was one of the very few people other than engineers who lived in airconditioned comfort. He had one of those big shipping containers and an airconditioner fitted and all that type of thing and he lived in dust-free airconditioned comfort all day

29:00 until I made him move it. The rat even had his bed in there. He used to have this reverse cycle all singing American airconditioner. Talk about the life of Riley! And here he was charging the poor little diggers for repairing their watch or their little radio.

Was there any gambling or anything like that?

There is always gambling wherever there is soldiers, whether it be dice or cards.

29:30 You never saw two-up but you saw dice and cards. Some commanders within reason allowed it. I never liked it and my commander allowed it in 161. I didn’t like it because I believe gambling leads to theft. Whilst I didn’t experience any theft in my time there, I didn’t feel it wouldn’t be long before it raised its ugly head.

30:00 It would happen in every unit and there is no way you will ever stop it.

Was there any way the average infantry soldier could make an extra buck?

Other than gambling, no. You were sort of like being born and dying, you arrived with nothing and you went home with nothing. Because he was arrived and he was taken and put in

30:30 to a tent in a platoon area where he was watched all the time, probably because he had to have his weapons right, his clothing right, and everything else right for the operation. When he wasn't there he was out on operations and when he came back, if he wasn't on operations he was on leave or he was sick or something like that. There was nowhere for him to go or any time to do anything to get into a racket. The base wallahs, who were in Nui Dat all the time,

31:00 whatever their task there was always some time in the life of a tradesman where you are working with people in stores to get things. And if you are a tradesman you can make things in return for this and he can give you stores and give someone else so there was a great interchange going on and some of them. I don't say they made millions out of it but

31:30 they lived very comfortably and supplemented the pay by demanding grog in return for favours.

You must have had an even lower opinion of the blokes at Vung Tau?

Engineers, yes I did. I went down to Vung Tau for something and I met an ex infanteer I knew. He was then in ordnance

32:00 and he really didn't want to know me, but he started at 8 o'clock on a whistle, he had morning tea on a whistle and he had lunch on a whistle and he knocked off on a whistle, and he did no more than he had to and on the basis of old boy friendship, "Have you got a case of grog?" And he had been bitten by the base wallah snake,

32:30 so I think any regular infanteer has a very low opinion of corps troops.

Weren't the infanteers called grunts?

That was an Americanism, the modern day soldier did. I never liked it. I never use it.

Did they have any other names for the infanteers?

They used to call them grunts.

That was adopted from the Yanks, was it?

Yes. The Yanks, they adopted a lot of American sayings but by and large

33:00 the infanteers don't call each other grunts. The young blokes might do because they don't know better but the older infanteers, you are an infantryman and you are normally pretty proud of the fact.

Can we talk about UDs? Unlawful discharges?

Yes. In my day they used to call it accidental discharge. There were a few of those and I think it was due

33:30 to the training. I complained about it in my time in 9 but wasn't in a position to do anything about it. 9RAR in particular was conceived, formed and trained and in operations within about twelve months so that, and I think it was sixty-three per cent of my company were National Servicemen and they were

34:00 generally pretty good to be around. If you take everyone on a hundred per cent scale, we never got the hundred per cent. You always got the eighty-five to ninety per cent standard of bloke in that bracket and they were largely bank Johnnies, certain university students who volunteered to give up their studies and do the job,

34:30 around that calibre of bloke. Some were tradesmen. But you never got the bum; they were always good blokes, level headed and generally pretty nice fellows. Weaponry of any kind was foreign to them and they were inducted and trained and then into it, and a lot of them absorbed so much

35:00 and then with the stress and strain of going into operations in many instance they just forgot to apply the safety catch and it was as simple as that, and all it takes is to push it forward with your thumb or take it back. It is an easy operation to forget and they think they see something or hear something and the finger is on the trigger and it is an

35:30 involuntary thing and boom. The sad part about it is that so often some poor bugger falls down dead. It happens with monotonous regularity. I won't say it happens all the time. We had a couple in my company and we lost one fellow and the poor bloke that did it, the fact that his twenty-eight days' pay and all this that is not the half of it.

36:00 He is utterly devastated for ever after. He is virtually… There is no crime like it. For a momentary loss of concentration, someone is dead. I thankfully, it never happened to me but I think it would be even more devastating to a young bloke than killing someone in a car accident or something like that,

because car accidents often

36:30 it is an error of judgment rather than just a momentary moment of forgetfulness, and no matter who has had triggered a fatal accident discharge has my deepest sympathy more than anything else. We had those and everyone starts feeling themselves

37:00 and it is not a nice situation to be in. But my greatest one of those happened in Malaya. I was going out with the machine gun platoon and we used to have in there what they call a pig, which is a Bedford truck, from which they removed the body. They called it a pig or a coffin. And they put this hexagonal shaped metal body on it.

37:30 It has doors in the side, the driver's and passengers' doors in the side, twin doors in the back, doors in the floor and doors in the top so if it rolls anyone who is fit enough can get out. They loaded me on with my signals gear, the inside, remember the old canite? It is about that thick. It is a fibrous thing they would line it to reduce vibration and noise. And

38:00 the truck is hauling about three and a half ton of iron and it is used against being sniped in the back of the trucks. They loaded me in with all of my gear and they loaded a few diggers in, and the machine gun has four sergeants, the platoon sergeant and three section sergeants, and two of these section sergeants were at the back and one was helping the other one up, and the one coming up had a shotgun

38:30 and this bloke leaned down and he had the barrel of the weapon up here, and he heaved and we had an accidental discharge, right into the truck. Everyone was stunned and everyone got out and looked and God knows what, and I found one dent in a radio but it didn't affect it at all. There was a patch off the roof where she came off and not

39:00 person got hit, and those rounds used to carry nine pellets about the size of a .22. And we said after that we were safe, no-one was hurt and that was my most frightening ever with an accidental discharge.

Tape 14

00:33 **Can you tell us about C Company coming in and tailing itself?**

Tell you what?

About C Company coming in around and tailing in on around itself? Is that not making sense?

Who told you about that?

When you speak to the person on the phone they passed some notes onto us.

01:00 It was C Company on the very first operation. I was D Company and all I know is that, you are generally in single file and on contact the machine gun goes to the right or to the high ground, the rifle team goes to the other side and you are in line then. And apparently, and

01:30 we heard the contact go on, we heard it but we didn't know anything about it until we heard it on the radio, "Contact," and as soon as you have a contact the signaller comes on and he says, "Contact, wait out." And, "Wait out," means the theory is, "This conversation is finished. I will call you back."

02:00 You sit there and you wait and it came on that somehow the head of C Company in this single file had turned around and the leading section had attacked the tail end of its own company, which turned and returned fire. And I think there were three dead and a number wounded. I have no idea how such a thing can occur but

02:30 it did in the case of C Company.

Do you know what the repercussions were of that?

No, it was something that I never heard discussed afterwards other than it was a sad event. And they tightened up on navigation and things of such nature in order to prevent it and it didn't happen again in my time.

03:00 It is very difficult to give an explanation of how such a thing could happen and we never, my company or no-one from my company as far as I knew, ever traversed that particular piece of ground of where it happened and I have no idea but that was on the very first day out of the wire.

03:30 **Towards the end of your time there, were you there for exactly twelve months?**

Yes.

What was it like? When did you start counting down?

Well I wasn't one who did that. You knew you had your twelve months to do and by the time I got there I

was a pretty experienced soldier so I didn't worry about it. But

04:00 when you arrived in Vietnam, especially in 161, everyone used to say to you, "Nobody has got 365 and a wakey to go," or, "364 and a wakey." And all the Q [Quartermaster's] Stores used to give you the Julian calendar, which is 365 days, and they used to start marking it off from day one. I never did that. I knew

04:30 in twelve months time all being well I would be home. I was out on operations and the boss said, "We have got a re-supply coming in, CSM," and I said, "Yes. I knew we were running out of rations. I'll fix the LZ and all that." And he said, "You will be going back on the chopper." I said, "Why?" And he said, "We have only got four days to go." And he said, "You are due to

05:00 leave the day after." And he said, "You can go back and prepare to RTA [Return to Australia] and the CQMS," which is the [company] quartermaster sergeant, "he will do the CSM's job and you can do the CQMS's job in there. How does that sound?" I said, "It suits me very well." I went back in and the day after I left they got a prisoner, and so the CQ [Company Quartermaster] come back in "Ha, ha I got a prisoner.

05:30 You never got a prisoner." And they rode me for all the time I was there until I came back. And they were going back out on operations again the day I left. I knew approximately, but you are on transport because for individuals the day in and out was of a Wednesday, and I come back in four days before because

06:00 they used to take a Hercules load each Wednesday. And the Hercules I came out on you didn't sit on seats, you sat on the floor and you had clean polyesters and ribbons and all that on and you had to sit on the floor. And I asked to keep my bag, we had a canvas bag, and I asked to sit on that so I wouldn't get dirty.

06:30 And they said no, it had to be put up behind a cargo net and I had to sit on the damn floor. The loadmaster had a jungle hat hanging up so I pinched it and sat on it and dared him to try and get it, and I had his hat on the ride back to Ton San Nhut.

Had you gone home for leave?

I came home and we were married on 8th December and in that I was able

07:00 to get seven days' R&R from 9 Battalion. I had it all teed up and I was able to get it from 9 Battalion before, in between operations, they allowed me to do that so I came back. You could go to Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore or you could come home, and I elected to come home and see my wife and family. You have got seven days' leave here

07:30 and you had to be back in Sydney at the airport at a certain time so I only lost an hour or so by travelling up to Brisbane.

How was that seven days?

Very good, I had time with the kids and I was able to take my wife out to the restaurant for dinner on our anniversary and all the family came over at different

08:00 times to say g'day, so it was a good seven days. I was a king for seven days. I wasn't allowed to do the washing up but that has all changed, I must admit. I was treated pretty well and it was good to have the kids come home and play with the kids. The young bloke had just started school and I was able to see him in his school uniform and all that type of thing.

08:30 It was good. I was pleased I came home.

Was it hard going back, though?

You don't like it but you know you have got to go so that is it. Not much given to emotion in that regard, the job is there to be done you get on and do it. This weeping and wailing all over the place wasn't in my ilk. We just batted on and did it and took what came.

09:00 I was a soldier and that was it, and if I had done my twelve months in Vietnam and when I got to Brisbane and they said, "You have got to go and do another twelve months," I would have said, "Where is my rations?" That was it, and that was the way my era of soldiering was brought up and that was the way I believe a soldier should be, and that is one of the reasons I say it is not the place for a married man.

09:30 **Did you see anything of the protesting about Vietnam?**

The only thing I saw, I was in South Australia and I was CSM of support company in 3 Battalion, and again we were just building up and we never had a full strength, so the RSM collared me

10:00 as the CSM of the honour guard and we buried Private Noak, the very first National Serviceman to be killed in Vietnam, and they brought him back to South Australia to bury him and his parents elected that he have a military funeral. We did what we were supposed to do. There was a very big crowd and I saw a bunch who were going

10:30 to turn it into a political stunt of some sort, but at the same time or before the police also saw it and they squashed it there and then. And one bloke was turned around by a policeman and marched away, whether he was completely arrested and taken away I don't know, but he was take out of the front rank and taken away and that was the only thing like

11:00 a demonstration I ever saw because I was never anywhere where they were held other than that one at Noak's funeral.

What was your reaction when years later Saigon eventually fell?

The inevitable has happened. It was gone long before it fell.

11:30 Vietnam was a result of Americans' anti-communism paranoia, and when you work it out in the time they were there they lost something in the vicinity of fifty-eight thousand dead, most of them conscripts, and they didn't want to be there. The Vietnamese that I

12:00 knew of, the units I knew of, they would want them to go from point A to point B and they would sit down and they wouldn't go unless they could take their wife and kids and this and that and all that. And they really in the main I don't think, because you have to remember they fought with the Viet Minh against the French, they had fought the Second World War and by the time I got there in early '68

12:30 they had thirty years of war and they were sick of it. They were just too much of it and I don't think they wanted to fight. The Vietnamese army even at its best was never as dedicated as the communist forces were, and it was often said, "How come they can enlist dedicated people like that and we can't?"

13:00 They were dedicated and they were willing to fight so I reckon it was possibly from about 1965 or '66 it was a foregone conclusion because day by day, by month by month, the Yanks were losing heart and the political deal at home wasn't supportive. And

13:30 when it went I just said, "The inevitable has eventually happened," and I wasn't surprised. I was just sorry that so much blood had been spilt for really no good reason other than American paranoia, that's all it was, and that was my thought all the way.

14:00 **Over the span of your career in the army, how did you see it change?**

It changed dramatically. When I joined the sergeants' mess when we came home from Korea we had one married man who had joined us since we arrived, and by the time we left to go to Malaya the first time I think we had something in the vicinity of

14:30 five or six single men still left in the mess – our soldiers were in the main married. So the single man's army gave way to the married man's army and so much of it had to change to cater for the married man, and so much of your defence budget went into providing

15:00 marriage facilities for married men and looking after wives and so forth like that. In my day we used to attend leave parade as a private soldier and we went on leave, then the NCOs went on leave and then the officers went on leave, and by the time I got out the diggers and the NCOs had

15:30 to move over or the officers would run them over because the dedication wasn't there, and I don't think it still is to this day. It is a long time since I got out but I don't think a lot of people think when I speak like this they say mindless dedication. Well it may be, but that is the way we were we were brought up that we joined the army and we volunteered for the army

16:00 and so therefore we were there by choice. And they expected us to do the job as it was supposed to be done and we did it as it was supposed to be done. That was the way we lived and that was the way we played. We worked hard and we played hard. We had the respect of our officers and the officers had our respect as well, and I don't think a lot of that applies today.

16:30 We had a Secretary for Defence who was fairly unpopular, a Secretary for the Army, Sir Arthur Tang, and he kept the army separate from the Public Service and he kept the services separate from the Public Service. Well now the army can't move unless the Public Service says so and

17:00 as a result it has become very Public Service oriented and very much politicised along Public Service lines and I think it is to the detriment to the army. You could see it happening around you I never had the rank or the strength to do anything about it, but I feel that happened in my time and I am sad that I just couldn't stop it or join any group that could stop it.

17:30 Some people call it progress; I don't.

When you look back over your career, do you see your involvement in everything that you have done as separate chapters?

As separate chapters? Yes they were, because different time, different time of life, different place and environment, different people. They were all really separate chapters

18:00 of a very large volume.

Is there one particular chapter that has affected you more than another?

When you say affect, I think one of the happiest times really was the time from Korea to embarking for Malaya at Ingleburn. We really had an idyllic life then

18:30 and we were very happy. We had the Tattoos which were different and we also had our colours, we presented our colours. I think it is all built on now that section down in the Sydney Domain. Sir William Slim gave us our colours down there. We had the National Service demonstration and we were busy and happy in a very friendly environment and

19:00 I think that would be the happiest time. I think Korea would be the worst time, mainly because of the environment in which we were and the intensity of it because there was no relief. You were in the line all the time except when they took you back a few yards and someone else took over the line and

19:30 you were in reserve. I think that was the most intensive time from that point of view and the most likely to be hurt as far as I was concerned. But Vietnam, I don't think, there is danger there, but I don't think anything like Korea and Malaya was generally very physically hard, but that

20:00 was in pure physical effort. I don't think the danger was there and it was rather a good time was had. That is the way I view each of the places I was in. Borneo was intriguing. I was happy to get out of Borneo because I think had we continued there

20:30 one of the days one of those little Indons could have caught up with us, but they didn't in the time I was there. But I would say that was one of the most dangerous periods I had.

What kind of affects do you think all the moving around that you did as part of your years in the service, what kind of affect did that have on your family?

In the main, the family,

21:00 my wife was used to it really because she was air force and the children were too small. The son came here to Toowoomba, we lived in another house then but he had grown and left home by the time we moved from there, and essentially our children grew up in Toowoomba and really only knew Toowoomba. Our move to Malaya and home, he was a baby and two when we went home. The daughter was a baby.

21:30 We moved from South Australia, the third one was a baby and the others were quite small, and we moved to Brisbane and he started school but whilst in Grade 1 we moved up here so they don't remember much about it. So they got great stability, more stability than ever I had in my life in Toowoomba, and once I got to Toowoomba here we stayed. Our moves were over and done with in a fairly short period of time.

22:00 We have got more stability than a lot of servicemen do.

What are your thoughts on PDSD [Prolonged Duress Stress Disorder]?

Any shock or trauma or persistent nervous pressure will have some effect on different fellows,

22:30 and I have read a lot and I always go back to World War I and when you look at the horrors of World War I, what those fellow went through, and thanks to 'Breaker' Morant the Australians never had anyone shot, but the Pommies shot over three hundred who were

23:00 charged with cowardice because the poor devils ran away. When you think of those horrors and when you look at Korea in three years there was something like a third of the men committed. We had three hundred and thirty-odd dead in ten years with three times the amount committed, we had over fifty thousand go through there and we had five hundred dead.

23:30 I question the validity of some cases of PDSD but you can't ever say that the human mind accepts it in its entirety. Some people have it and some people don't. If a bloke is analysed and is able to convince the powers that be that he has got it

24:00 that is his problem, but it is a bit of a vexatious point when you think of what others before you have endured and it came to light. In the same vein, we used to call them the flying pressure pack. It was a half-sized Hercules called a C123 rather than the 4-engine Hercules, and they used to

24:30 hear the pressure, just like the big pressure pack going off, and we were sprayed and I reckon I was sprayed four or five times and everything you felt felt oily. And then these people come up with Agent Orange [defoliant]. I was fortunate we had no more children after we came home from Vietnam, but when you consider the number of Vietnam veterans whose wives have

25:00 given birth to disabled children I feel there is some credence there, I really do. But whether it was Agent Orange, one doesn't know. But there is so much of that affliction that I think there is some credence to it. A lot of people come up with this post traumatic stress, well sufficient of them have convinced the medical population that they have a case so there must be some credence there,

25:30 but luckily I escaped it. And in all my service I think the worst I got was we were clearing an LZ and the

boss told us to lay down and not to get up until after the explosion, and so they said, “What explosion?” And he said, “A Canberra bomber is going to bomb not far from you.” We laid down

26:00 and this thing flew over a couple of times and the next thing there is this unholy crack and within seconds I felt something and I had just enough to raise blood across the arm there, just enough of these little beads of blood came, and then this other piece landed and this kid darbied on it and picked it up and in the throes of saying, “It is mine,” it burnt his hand. He had a jagged piece of bomb about that big

26:30 and it landed quite close to us. But I had this scratch just along the arm there and I was laying down like this and it just crossed my arm and that was as close as I come to it. And whatever I have told you today I have been through, and I have never been hit and a lot have gone around me in various times but I have never been hit so I regard myself as pretty fortunate.

27:00 Post traumatic stress, it is out there and I think the case has not yet been argued into its entirety.

Do you march on Anzac Day or Vietnam Veterans’ Day?

I march on Anzac Day only. I march with 3 Battalion in Brisbane. Not mainly to march, but it is the only way you can keep up with your mates. We gather at the start of the march

27:30 and at the end of the march is after three quarters of a mile away and you say to them, “I will meet you at a certain place.” Well someone takes them for a beer and they don’t turn up so the only way to keep up with them is to walk with them and then go with them at the end of the march. So I normally march with 3 Battalion at the end of the march. I team up with the blokes because in my active time I did over almost

28:00 fifteen years with 3 Battalion so I was very well known in it and I know a lot of people who have passed through it.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

In what respect?

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

At one time, like the army said, you used to get there and you all used to tell lies and

28:30 you knew you were telling lies but you all enjoyed it. Now when you got back to the early ’50s we are coming up, we have known each other for fifty years and so, “There is my grandson,” and, “There is my granddaughter,” and, “There is my son doing this.” And so you reminisce what about old mates long gone and where are they and you find out who is still

29:00 with you and who is not, and so Anzac Day has changed. And you get back to see each other again and you have known each other for fifty years so it is long time friendships renewed each year. The shot and shell has past, it is all gone now. Now and again someone will say, “Do you remember this time? Do you remember that?” And you have a laugh like that. Someone has heard new yarns or something like that

29:30 and so it is changed in that idea, and we were young and brash and still willing to fight Ned Kelly, you sit back and let the young fellows do it. It is something that I don’t go to, Long Tan Day. I see they have Rats of Tobruk Day, they have got VE [Victory in Europe] Day VJ [Victory over Japan] Day. It will finish up you will have a day for

30:00 everything. I think it is enough to get together one day of the year, Anzac Day, and that is it. And I go down just for the company of all the old fellows that I have know for so long. I don’t think any more deeply about it than that.

30:30 **The Americans really fought a body count kind of war. Did Australian engage in that?**

The body count, well you did that because you had to, you counted the bodies, but we never went out to specifically for the body count. We went out to clear an area and if you got bodies, yours you got rid of, his

31:00 with a trenching tool is not much so you never got him down much deeper than that and I suppose the chances are if you went back six months later the animals had got at it, but at least you gave them the dignity of getting them below ground. I used to make the diggers around me carry a tin of biscuits, a tin about yay round and that big, and I used to put on it

31:30 an enemy dead, a grid reference and the date, and put the lid back down and turn it upside down on him so that they knew that it was not what I term Allied dead, and if they wanted to dig him up and give him a decent burial they knew how long he was gone. We used to get them below ground. But then you knew you had the effects of different people,

32:00 and they were sent back because most of them carried a bag of some sort around them and you put the effects in a bag and labelled it accordingly. It was one of six bodies or one of five bodies and so many bodies. And quite often you used to pray that you never got too many bodies because you had to dig to get them down and that was the thing. And to go out and say to judge an operation on

how many dead I don't think was in our catalogue at all.

What about the majority of airlift operations that you had, was that by and large with 9 Squadron or was it just the Americans?

No, it was the American squadrons. 9 Squadron would take part but they never had enough helicopters. A hundred helicopters used to just come and go. 9 Squadron would be lucky to have

ten or fifteen. No, they used to come from some American air wing and predominantly American, and the gun ships were predominantly American and yeah, that was all American stuff.

The Odd Angry Shot, have you seen that film?

No, I have heard a bit about it but I haven't seen it. That was Graham Kennedy, wasn't it? No I don't know that one.

Have you seen any Vietnam war films that you can connect with?

I saw something, I was absolutely horrified, some thing in America, an American thing about Korea where at the end of it one of them is calling all the dead names and this bloke is throwing medals down the mountainside. I never saw one in Malaya and

I saw John Wayne in the Green Beret, which nauseated me. And I don't know whether I've got time, but I was in Korea, I had a Purple Heart for about ten or twenty seconds. If you get wounded in the American Army you get a purple heart. Anyway I got glandular something or other and my throat all swelled, like a bad case of tonsillitis,

so I went back through and I finished up in this American ADS, advanced dressing station, and while I was there they brought in the remains of a tank crew that had driven into a minefield and some of them weren't too bad and a couple were fairly badly knocked about. I think there were four of them altogether, might have been three, I can't remember. And I am laying there this day and I wasn't feeling real well with this

because they were threatening that if my throat didn't open up they were going to open me here and let me breathe. I wasn't pleased about this so I am lying in bed mulling this over and we were in what they call a Quonset hut, which is a half circle, and the doors open and in come this apparition, I call it. It was an American provo and he had beautifully shiny painted black helmet with a big white MP [Military Police] on it and he had

a big scarf here, white and immaculately starched, greens and big lanyards and he moved like an automaton or robot. And he marched in and behind him is coming this bloke with scrambled egg [gold braid] all over his cap. And he has got this sister, we called them a sister, and I got into trouble with her because I called her, "Excuse me, sister," and she said, "Don't you call me sister. You call me ma'am."

"Oh I am sorry. We call our nurses sisters." "Well you don't in the United States Army." "Sorry madam." Anyway she is with him and there is a bloke walking behind him and he has a big purple cushion and behind him again is a bloke with a box of medals and this little entourage come, and he would go to a bed and the bloke behind with the box of medals would put a medal on the cushion and he would take it off the cushion and put it on the bed,

"Thank you soldier," and march on. He come to my bed and turned around and picked up the medal and put it on my bed, "Thank you soldier." The sister said something to him and he come back and he looked at me and took his medal back and went to the next bed, so I had a medal for that long.

Did you ever have R&C [Rest in Country] at Vung Tau?

Once, and we went to a concert there and it was only a day.

You never got a week off?

No, in infantry you never got a week off. If you got a week off you were on R&R and you went out of the country to Singapore, Bangkok or home to Australia or something like that.

Did you ever get into Saigon?

Twice, I flew in with 161 and in a helicopter and we went right to Sheaths Supreme Headquarters East Asian Command

or something like that, and it was just a big building and brass everywhere and I went and hid because everything was an officer and you were like this all the time (demonstrates) so I thought "I will get out of here." So I went and hid and read a book and finished up making my way… I spoke to the guard and sat in the helicopter and read a book because there was too much brass around there.

In the course of all your service, did you pick up souvenirs?

No, not many. I never hunted for souvenirs. My wife has it here somewhere. I got a little brass rooster only about that big and I picked him up off a Viet Cong, he was wearing it, so I wore it in my hat for the remainder of the time I was in Vietnam. My wife has got it in there

somewhere, but I never really gathered

38:30 **souvenirs or anything like that.**

Have you ever had bad dreams or anything, any problems at all?

No, no, I have had dreams but you wake up and think about it, “You bloody fool,” and go back to sleep. Never worried me, no, nothing like that. It is there and you live with it, that is all.

39:00 Never affected me or anything like that. My wife reckons when I came out of Borneo I was a bit restless at night and once, maybe twice, she woke me up because I do think in Borneo I was under more stress than most people when I was out on operations. I never got caught or anything like that so I suppose it was the stress of getting out of that, but

39:30 it didn’t last all that long. But she used to say, “You were restless last night,” or, “You were singing out in your sleep.” But I don’t think I could ever say it bothered me.

INTERVIEW ENDS