Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Mackay (Chuck, Big Mac) - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:43 **Could you begin by sharing with us an overview of your life? Where you were born to where you finished up in your military career?**

Yeah, I was born in Sydney, Summer Hill. I went

01:00 to school at a marvellous demonstration school in Haberfield [Haberfield Demonstration School], which was a very high standard of primary school. Then onto Sydney Grammar, with a minor hiccup of going to Fort Street, [Fort Street High School] which was a selective school. Sydney Grammar was a great experience. I was in the cadets. I had some motivation, as a pretty reasonable sportsman, much more than an academic, but I had some motivation about the military from an uncle who

01:30 had been killed on the Kokoda Track [New Guinea, July 1942 – January 1943]. He was commissioned. He was killed on Armistice Day, in 1942. So there was not a great military tradition in the family, but this particular uncle who was the youngest of ten and my father was the oldest, I had some relation with him. Pretty young, I was born in 1934, so I was five when the war broke out. But Sydney Grammar was an interesting experience. And I did pretty well in the cadets. I joined late, but I

02:00 did become a senior officer or something, and certainly enjoyed it, but I was a rugby player more than anything. So I was going to go to Sydney University, but I had a knee operation that said that I couldn't play rugby for twelve months. So, for some pretty almost bizarre trivial reason, I actually took up 'entrance' [entrance exam] at Duntroon [Royal Military College], which I qualified for early. So I went into the college late, and I had a

02:30 marvellous four years at Duntroon, in which sport again, played a big part. But I was an under officer at the Royal Military College and graduated, I think, about fifth in the class. We had a marvellous group of guys. I went to infantry. I had actually been put into the signal corps by our then commanding officer, who is now General Hassett, who became the chief of the Defence Force. They wanted to have all the sort of good guys in the various arms, but we all

03:00 wanted to be in infantry because Korea was on and then there were all sorts of other motivations. And just harking back to Sydney Grammar, Sir Robert Menzies, when he was Prime Minister, did a clever thing called 'The Call To The Nation' and I remember being in the Sydney Grammar School hall and the sun was coming through one of the windows, the afternoon light, and it was very interesting….propaganda it was,

03:30 in retrospect, about how we should face the 'Yellow Peril'. So there was almost some Sir Galahad, knight on horse element, charging forward to….World War 111 was inevitable. To us, as seventeen and eighteen year olds, the world was progressing rapidly to war. So there was that motivational instinct in it, which seemed to come to me when I was at a crossroads, so I went to Duntroon. Had a marvellous time, graduated into infantry and we're a very close bunch, still. There's six of us, still

04:00 meet in Sydney, at a cheap old fish shop in Crow's Nest, and reminisce, and that is more than fifty years on from graduation. That is a very tight group and formed the basis for much of the camaraderie and spirit which the army and the infantry produced. And which I've even found some aspect of that in

civilian life in subsequent times, in good companies. The mateship camaraderie, the reliance on

04:30 each other….A democratic form of leadership I suppose, comes out of it. Okay, Duntroon, into infantry, I got my way out of signal corps, although I was a closet academic. I hadn't shown that in the early part of my life, but I spent a fair bit of the rest of my time trying to make sure that I was up to date with technology and even academic requirements. So I went

05:00 to the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, which was at Ingleburn, and that was a good training ground. Interestingly, I was under consideration for the 'Wallabies' [national rugby union team] then, to go on a seven month trip around the world, and unbeknown to me, I was deferred by generals I didn't know; approached by the Rugby Union, and instead of going to Malaya with a lot of my contemporaries, and I couldn't understand why I wasn't, I was held back to go away with the '57 Wallabies.

05:30 I was actually told three days before they were selected that I was on full pay, attached to the Brigade of Guards, and I would have had that marvellous trip. I went to hospital with hepatitis instead, the night before the Australia versus The Rest game [final Wallaby selection trial], one of the great regrets of my life, but one which I managed to get over. I spent three months in hospital, instead of being on the high seas with all those marvellous footballers and touring America and Europe and playing top rugby. And I, three months later,

06:00 staggered out of hospital and told I was to do nothing terribly strenuous for the next twelve months, so I went around to become a foundation member of the 'Special Air Service'. It was then called 1st SAS Company in Swanbourne. Ironically, I went on the boat that the Wallabies had gone on three months earlier. And all the crew could tell me about was what a marvellous time the fellows had on the trip. I arrived at Swanbourne Military Camp, and on the first afternoon

06:30 I went on about a twenty mile route march, on the sand. I had been in hospital for three months, and the temperature was about one hundred and ten degrees. I think the platoon carried me back. I was a reconnaissance officer, I think I managed to keep up an appearance of leadership, but I staggered back into camp that day and survived all this, and had a marvellous time in the SAS in West Australia, then became adjutant of the City of Perth Regiment. I was promoted.

07:00 I left this marvellous SAS company, which we were learning the ropes outdoors. We jumped out of aeroplanes, and we drove tugboats, and we dived, and went on submarines. It was like 'Boys Own Annual'. But we were training for war and it was pretty serious, in the undercurrent. Had a marvellous time in West Australia. I took a group up to the Kimberleys to cut LZs or landing zones, for

07:30 helicopters, but then the people of Darwin, or the mayor of Darwin thought that the Indonesians were invading, so this was 1958, and so we rushed into town, into Darwin, at great trouble. We left the outback and went into the pubs of Darwin with forty fit young 'Diggers' of the SAS, who had been to Malaya. We were there to defend the people of Darwin. After four days, the mayor asked if we wouldn't mind moving the troops out of town because they thought they preferred the Indonesians to the SAS.

08:00 But, however….We went down to 'Rum Jungle', interestingly, and found an SAS officer there who had been at the landings at Caen, in Normandy, in 1944, and he was the manager of the 'Rum Jungle mine'. We sat around in the afternoon, and he produced the crates of beer and the Diggers talked about where should the machine guns go. It was a marvellous afternoon in the Northern Territory with the bloke reliving his….He became the boss of Comalco, subsequently.

08:31 From those SAS days, heady days….Adjutantcy of City of Perth Regiment, which was almost like a chore, you had to be a CMF [Citizens Military Force] Reserve, double bookkeeping, accounting. None of us even knew how to spell it, but we protected the Commonwealth's funds. Very interesting time there. Then to adjutant of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment. So I finally got to Malaya, later. I didn't get the Wallaby trip, but I got the Malayan experience. I went away with

09:00 the 2nd Battalion. I was in an advance party. Colonel Stretton, subsequently General Stretton of Darwin fame, was the CO [Commanding Officer]. And I was in Kuala Kangsar for a while, in North Malaya. Did some work with the 'Ghurkhas' [Royal Ghurkha Rifles] up in Grik, then down to the new camp that was established in Malacca. An eleven million pounds sterling camp that the 'Brits' [British] built for what was then called

09:30 the 28th Commonwealth Brigade and we moved in and occupied that camp. And it was a marvellous barracks in the jungle just outside Malacca. Subsequently it was given away to the Malayan forces about seven or eight years later. So this marvellous showpiece was a change in British attitudes, and the Malays benefited from it. I didn't stay too long in that camp, which was called 'Terendak'. I was grabbed for a job with the British Army

10:01 down at the jungle warfare school at Kota Tinggi, down near Johor, in Johor State, just across the causeway from Singapore. That's probably the best job for a captain in the Australian Army that has ever existed. It was a marvellous training ground. It was a very well acclaimed battle school from the counter terrorist operations of the British experience, in particular, of Malaya. And they relied very heavily on Australian and New Zealand instructors. They had their own' pink-cheeked' British officers

10:30 out there, who had been in the jungle for the first time at the school….That's not quite right. There were some very good jungle fighters there, too, but it's nice to do some 'Pom bashing' [to poke fun at the

British]. And we trained Indonesians, and we trained them too well, because they started shooting at us a bit later on, in the confrontation. But we trained Indonesians, Malayans of course, Brits, Australians, New Zealanders, Cambodians, Laotians, Nepalese, Ghurkhas….Americans, particularly, discovered the camp.

11:00 The chronology now is 1961, ’62. Vietnam was just surfacing. Kennedy [John Kennedy, President of the United States] was the president. The Green Berets [American Special Forces] were in. There were about five to eight thousand Americans in Vietnam when I first went up there in ’62. And I became a bit of a ‘rover’. It was a marvellous addition to my excellent job, because the Brits and the Russians were co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference for Indo-China. So

11:30 the ‘Brits’ couldn’t go anywhere. Now, I wore a ‘slouch hat’ and was able to go, although I was working for the British Army, I was able to roam Vietnam reasonably free. The Training Team…I was actually there before the first Training Team, but I was there with it, too. And that marvellous character, Colonel Serong, who commanded the Training Team, and who died just recently, a book’s out on him, he took me under his wing a bit, and I was in some very high level….As a young captain, I was in some heady stuff

12:00 in Saigon. I was in a meeting one day in Saigon when there was a coup against President Diem [President Ngo Dinh Diem, Republic of South Vietnam], and the aircraft came down the main street and bombed. The pilots were defecting…Rather they defected to Cambodia. But that was pretty exciting stuff. I was sitting on Colonel Serong’s left hand and he was very highly prized by the Americans. And it was a pretty interesting introduction to the strategic side of war, as well as I was out on the ground, running with various

12:30 units, getting experience to take back to train. Remember we’re training the Vietnamese and all these other nationalities in the Jungle Warfare School in Kota Tinggi, in Johor. So I had a few trips in the ’62, ’63 time frame. I had a very close look at American operations when there were good tight American groups in Vietnam. And it was a fascinating look at the situation.

13:00 I would just like to go back to my ‘Duntroon’ days. I became a bit focused, the word might even be ‘obsessed’ with Indo-China, in about 1954, as a cadet at Duntroon. I somehow realised that the Dien Bien Phu [battle of, 1953-1954], the big battle where the French were finally thrown out of Indo-China, it was a bit of a watershed for the world, or rather a lynchpin for national terrorist movements which were overthrowing national governments, and colonial governments. An

13:30 aftermath of the anti-colonial effect of World War 11. So I had this focus on Indo-China, pretty well, and it was so exciting that my first real actions in my life were in Indo-China, in and around the Vietnamese-Cambodia border, and all over and a bit of a free-ranging rover, as a young officer. I think I handled it reasonably well. I can’t imagine I was mature enough, but I coped with pretty interesting forty eight hour ‘dashes’

14:00 across cross-country. Some of these Vietnamese troops were so good, because they followed principles like Australian involvement. No helicopters, no noise. Run across country and hide. These were ‘ranger’ battalions, mostly. They were the equivalent of our sort-of commando troops. So this fortunate breadth of experience that I had in Vietnam, in those early years, in ’62, ’63. I went back to Australia in

14:30 early 1964, on promotion to be company commander and instructor at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. So I was back there within about seven or eight years of having graduated, almost too quick. I had too much sympathy for what the cadets might be trying to do. Been liberalised a bit, in those ensuing years. I think they might have even been allowed to have a glass of beer once a week, or something, twenty-one-year-olds. But a very interesting time there.

15:00 I did three years at Duntroon, ’64, ’65, ’66. I coached the rugby side. I played, I think I was actually captain of Australian Services [sports team] in that first year as well. I was still playing in 1964. I was getting a bit ‘long in the tooth’ [old], but I enjoyed Duntroon. It was a marvellous institution. What that gave me was a spread of fellows over three years, instructing,

15:30 yet covering about seven years worth of cadets, if you can understand. It was a four year course. Amongst some of my proteges or ‘charges’ were General Peter Cosgrove, and a few other guys of some note. Peter Cosgrove was a marvellous late developer. I had a bit to do with him as a brigadier and I still have some contact with him. So that’s Duntroon. Off to Vietnam again, if you like. But

16:00 officially, this time, with the 6th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, I was appointed to command B Company….This is meant to be a synopsis, and I’ll cut the detail a bit…But that was a marvellous battalion. In my opinion probably one of the finest battalions that has ever been sent overseas. Commanded by Colin Townsend, and a great group of company commanders and a great group of ‘Diggers’. It was the first National Service intake, and they were great young men.

16:30 They had been signed up, I guess, in ’65. So the first intake of National Service. And they were the ‘cream of the crop’. First of all, it was the top five per cent were only selected anyway, and then in amongst that, the best of the infantry. And in the 6th Battalion, we had the best of the best. And I had a number of contemporaries who were saying, “Oh, the country’s going to ‘pot’, and the youngsters are of no use.” Well, those kids came through and delivered. For most of them it was one of the most significant events of their lives. I’m

17:00 still in contact with many of them. Of course, war is bloody awful, but these guys, as I say, most of them coped. It was enormous pressure and those that didn't, we looked after sympathetically, as much as you can in a tough infantry battalion. They learnt quickly and they grew up quickly, these twenty year olds. So I had great admiration, and I got into a few fights when I came back, talking about how great the youth of Australia were with some of my conservative colleagues. The battalion went home in the middle of '67. I went to join

17:30 another very interesting appointment. I became, I think my title was….Liaison Officer Headquarters to Field Force Victor, which is shorthand for saying an American Corps Headquarters, run by one of the best generals I will ever meet, General Fred Weyand, who subsequently led the Americans at peace talks in Paris, in the early '80s. And I worked to

18:00 General Weyand as an Australian representing the Task Force commander. And so I was able to go backwards and forwards from Nui Dat, the Australian base, and I was located at Long Binh, north of Saigon, and I lived in Binh Hoa. Very interesting, living with American chopper pilots. More broadening of my young education, and a very interesting role. Then I was out in the field one day, and I had an American sergeant, who used to usually stuff things up. And he arrived

18:30 up to me, he was Negro and he had a big smile and he said, "Sir, I have a posting order for you here." He said, "You are going to be posted to Quebec in Pakistan." I said, "Sergeant, I don't think your geography is right." "Yes sir," he said, "I've got it here. Quebec in Pakistan." Quebec was spelt Q-U-E-TT

and it was Quetta on the Afghan border. So I came back to Australia when Harold Holt [Harold Holt, Prime Minister of Australia] disappeared, I came back to collect my family. By that time I had a

19:00 young daughter, who stood with her hands on her hips at the door when I came in and she said, "Daddy? Where have you been? For a year?" And my daughter says she never recovered from that. She missed her father. But that was only when she wants something. Yeah, I was actually then involved in a very interesting…court case, I suppose it was. Whilst I was in Australia, Harold Holt had

19:30 disappeared, but also another fellow disappeared. The fellow I took over from 'B' Company in 1966, in Vietnam, had done a successful year at the staff college, by the name of Major Noel Ford. He was not a close friend of mine, but I had great respect for him as a soldier. I went to dinner with him on New Year's Eve, he made a particular point of getting a few of us from Vietnam with him, he was on his way back to a unit in Brisbane from the staff college in Melbourne, and he's never

20:00 been seen since, after the dinner. I was one of the last people to see him, presumably alive. There were rumours of sightings in South America of Major Noel Ford but we think he probably wound up inside a shark off Bondi, on New Year's Day. His car was found there, but it's a bit of a mystery. So I had to attend…I was getting on a plane to go to Quetta and I had to attend, I think, a court of inquiry, to try and establish whether he committed suicide or whether…

20:30 It's still a story, some of the soldiers of the company still reckon they see him around Townsville, or he's sighted around South America, but never heard of since. Off to the wilds of the Afghan border, with a young daughter. It was a marvellous experience. There weren't any Russians 'on the course', and this was the height of the Cold War. This was 1968, but Russia and China had a big influence in Pakistan at this stage. And I spent

21:00 every bit of time I could in Afghanistan, early on in the course, with a very good 'Brit' officer, who had a Military Cross in Ireland, who subsequently commanded a brigade in the Falklands [Falklands war, May 1982], and with whom I'm in close touch with, still. He now lives in Vermont. He's a baronet and an ex-brigadier. You can imagine how the Americans love having a maverick baronet, brigadier, living amongst them in Vermont. But he and I took off to Afghanistan, quite a bit. With our families some of the time, whenever we could. We went exploring archaeological digs

21:30 in the north. One of the occasions I managed to meet the then Prime Minister who was in hiding, Mohammed Daoud. I have a book inscribed by him, and I only discovered recently that the Russians assassinated him. He got too much of an independent spirit sometime in the late '80s. I just attended a literary lunch yesterday with Christopher Kremmer, who has written a book called 'Carpet Wars', in which some of these matters were discussed. And we shared notes

22:00 in front of a marvellous group yesterday, at a club in Sydney. So Afghanistan, we found more exciting than Pakistan. The staff college course, itself, was quite fascinating. I mentioned Russians, but the Chinese were probably closer advisors to Pakistan at that stage, and the Russians were competing for India's influence. There were all sorts of nuclear worries. It's amazing how things come around full scope. Here we are in 2004, talking about Pakistan's nuclear capability, and India. And certainly Russia and China have been part

22:30 of that plot. I found Afghanistan very interesting. The border areas, the tribal areas, the Pathans, and I've had a preoccupation with that area. I suppose Indo-China was my first, and Afghanistan was my second. And I thought I might like to take the 'blue rinse' back on trips to Afghanistan in the years of my retirement, but unfortunately the Russians and the Americans and everybody, have buggered that country and belted the hell out of it. Nothing much for the 'blue rinse set' in

23:00 post-Taliban Afghanistan. Righto, we're back from Afghanistan, back to the joys of Canberra, Defence

Department. You have to do it sometime. Well, actually army headquarters it was then. Although I did have a nice little trip around the world on the way back. I managed to cash in a ticket. I brought roubles in the marketplace in Kabul, it was a great free world market, and I converted an airline ticket back to Australia, into an around the world ticket with my wife. We went to Moscow

23:30 and London and Spain and all sorts of beautiful places that I didn't get to on the Wallaby tour in 1957. We left our daughter in a 'purdahed' household on the Afghan border, with a very good Pakistani family, and she had a ball. Behind the high walls of the courtyard with Alsatian dogs guarding because the women were not allowed to be seen. She had a marvellous experience and she still talks about it. We picked her up in Karachi on the way, as riots were breaking out…

24:01 The overthrow of Ayub Khan was that year. Kristianne went to school, escorted by soldiers, in the township of Quetta. The riots started there and he was overthrown. It was a very turbulent year. In fact, there were probably more people killed in Pakistan that year, than there were in Vietnam. So I went from Vietnam to a peaceful life on the Afghan border, like hell. Back to Canberra, fairly boring staff job as a major. Then I was

24:30 promoted to lieutenant colonel, a more boring staff job, in the infantry directorate. Then I got some really good breaks. I went to command the 7th Battalion. The 7th Battalion came back from Vietnam, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Grey, then later General Ron Grey. A very distinguished battalion commander and

25:00 I took command of it from Ron Grey, and we were in the lovely, salubrious barracks of Holsworthy, again, peace-time soldiering. A bit of a letdown, but a great challenge to keep the soldiers' interest, and a fascinating two years as the commanding officer of a battalion of the regiment [Royal Australian Regiment]. An honour which I am very cognizant of, and it stays with you for life. That was a great job. From there, I then

25:30 went to be the assistant to the chief of the general staff [CGS]. I think my sequence is right. Which was another interesting job. Sir Mervyn Brogan was the first CGS, then General Frank Hasset took over. Fascinating, but the bureaucrats were in control, and I could see that in the peace time army, even a lieutenant general didn't have too much authority. I didn't consciously think about getting out by any means, but it was a

26:00 bit sobering. I had been a battalion commander, I had been a company commander in action, and I had been in the SAS. I had done just about all there was to do as an active soldier. I was coaching and chairman of selectors of Australian Services Rugby, and I was keeping in contact with my 'Barbarian' colleagues. I did play for the 'Barbarians', and I am on the committee of the 'Barbarians', still. Which is a great international rugby organisation, devoted to preserving traditional values of rugby, as against the

26:30 declining standards of professionalism. And so I went out to another very good job then. I got nicely side-tracked back into keeping my eyes on the army and defence. I had been very joint in all that I did. By joint, I don't mean smoking cigarettes, I mean talking about army, navy, air force co-operation. I had been involved right from the start, I guess SAS. But even in my first posting,

27:00 I was very close to navy and air force guys. I was an instructor for three years at the Joint Services Staff College, which is Australia's senior defence college. It was pretty new then. I attended the course in between being assistant to the chief of the army and taking up the battalion, I did the six month course. So I was back as an instructor, after the battalion, and it was a marvellous

27:30 three years. We were training Filipinos, once again these Asians, Filipinos, Americans, 'Brits'….Indonesians got back in by then, they'd stopped shooting at us. And Malays, Cambodians again, army, navy, air force, US [United States] Marines, they added a bit of colour to the course. At full colonel, half colonel level, captain, commander, group captain air force. That was marvellous. We went on trips around

28:00 Asia, and they were superbly broadening, and I was able to keep in contact with a lot of Asian colleagues, military, that I've been subsequently involved with in civilian life. So from there, I was promoted full colonel and went to the Department of Defence. It looked like a boring job, but it wasn't. It was fascinating. I was called Colonel Military Staff Strategic and International Policy, Department of Defence. And we worked near the chairman, chief of staff,

28:30 he was known then, office. And it was a very exciting job. I, on instinct, impulse, outbreak of peace, call it whatever you like, I left the army quite suddenly, before my full colonel rank was substantiated, I decided to be honest and tell the army I was leaving. It was a quite strong, rash decision. It wasn't to look after my family, because I was ensconced in a nice house in Canberra. I had built a couple of houses in Canberra, and my family were all settled, so I dragged them off to Melbourne for a year,

29:01 to become an executive of the Wormald Group. I subsequently became managing director of Wormald Security Group and had a very interesting commercial career. In brief summary, since I've left the military, I've had quite a lot of contact with the intelligence agencies. I've had quite a lot of contact with 'Defence' [Australian Department of Defence]. Not as a 'gun runner', as such, but because I've done it fairly gently and I left a fair gap after I left the army, I've been able to go back in and talk to 'Defence'

29:30 in a consultant sense for major organisations. And I worked for, first of all, an Australian multinational, The Wormald Group, then I worked for a British multinational for one year. They acquired me and the organisation I was with, and then Honeywell acquired that group. So I worked for an Australian, then a British, then an American multinational. And I still consult, to this day, to the American multinational on

30:00 defence matters, both in America and then directly into the Australian arm. And I've had interesting talks, just this week, with Defence Department people, on fairly strategic issues, organisational and equipment issues. So I've had a fairly rounded life, and that's a fairly long synopsis.

30:34 **What we'll now do, during the day, Chris [interviewer] and I will go back and address these subjects. Let us come back to your childhood. What are your first memories growing up?**

31:04 Well, they're certainly not military. First memories, probably three, four, five, fun in swimming pools and going to the beach with parents and playing with kids and playing 'Cowboys and Indians', I suppose.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had an elder sister, and she

31:30 was a pretty mature influence. She subsequently did medicine. She's a psychiatrist. We had a good relationship. My mother had a baby that was almost stillborn. So I had a younger sister for only a few days. But basically, my sister and I had a pretty good relationship. Never sort of bosom buddies, but nice, healthy gentle relationship. She used to bash me up, of course, as an elder sister. But

32:00 I remember the first time I beat her, she didn't beat me up any more. That's when I first realised that girls are smarter than boys.

And your dad, what was he like as a man?

He was a pretty 'hot-shot' businessman. But a very good guy. If our current Prime Minister is a cricket 'tragic', my father was a real sports 'tragic'. He was a good footballer and a good cricketer. They took one fullback with the Waratahs in 1926, and he was the

32:30 the second fullback to one of the best we ever had, Alex Ross. So he was a little like me. A frustrated international footballer. I did play quite a bit of international football, but I didn't represent Australia. He was a good father, an indulgent father, and a good provider. And he ended up being quite a hot shot. A general manager of an Argentinean firm here in Sydney. And my mother was the

33:00 strong discipline influence in the family. She was a marvellous woman. So I had a very happy childhood, so I don't have any reason.. if people say I've got neurosis, it's not because of my childhood.

Now your uncle, who got killed at Kokoda, how close were you to him?

I would have been very young. I certainly remember his house and his wife. I can't say that we had a great bonding relationship, because I guess I was five

33:30 when World War 11 started. He went to the Middle East, as a corporal, then sergeant, then he was commissioned in the field in New Guinea. And he had a Victoria Cross winner with him, whose name just eludes me at present. He appeared out of the mist to me in my SAS days, and told me more about my uncle and how he should have got a Victoria Cross. My uncle. They were all wiped out except this sergeant

34:00 in this Kokoda Track performance. But they were in Syria together and got promoted together. Jimmy Gordon was his name. And I think he might have even been recommended for the Bar to the Victoria Cross, very famous character. I do remember him coming into the kitchen of our house in Haberfield, and talking to the family about my uncle. My father was the eldest and Roy was the youngest, so my father had almost a paternal

34:30 interest. He was in a 'protected industry', so he was never a military type. A lovely vignette, on my graduation Sir William Slim was the governor general and presented our certificates, and I also had a general who presented me with his sword, which I have downstairs. General Broadbent, a World War 1 general. And 'Slim' was talking away and my father was standing beside me, and 'Slim' said,

35:02 "I hope you're going into infantry, young man. That's the only corps to be in, if you're a man." Then he suddenly remembered his manners, and he turned to my father and said, "Sorry, sir. You weren't an artillery man, were you?" And my father, who didn't want the governor general to apologise to him, immediately said, "No, no, no. I wasn't in the Service." But I loved 'Slim'. A rough, tough, 'gutsy' bloke. And he inspired many Australians.

Jimmy Gordon, who won the Victoria Cross,

35:31 **what did he actually share with you about your uncle?**

The first time in the kitchen, I would have been six or seven. I just remember an aura of heroism, and the fact that Roy was a great commander. Subsequently, in the mists of Geraldton, on a firing range in Western Australia, this figure appeared out of the mist and

36:00 he was with a group of school cadets, and sort of as an old soldier, almost a figure of fun with them, and this man was the bravest soldier. And he talked to me, as the sun came up, for hours…I don't remember the details, but it was a catharsis for him, I think, about having served with Roy in the Middle East and in New Guinea, and having his body to look after, and it was a pretty tough time. He was a marvellous raconteur, but the detail

36:30 is just lost in the warm, fuzzy glow of his admiration for Roy. He would have been older than Roy, I think. Roy put his age up. I think he was sixteen or seventeen when he went to the Middle East. So he's another of our characters. I was in Gallipoli recently, laying a wreath, on behalf of the 7th Battalion. You just see how much the sentiment and how brilliant that the

37:02 stupid sacrifices of Gallipoli, with all nations. And I related to Jimmy Gordon, talking there to the 'sun-risers' at Gallipoli. The same sort of emotional intensity. The futility of war, if you like, as well as a theme, but the great heroism and mateship.

Was Roy married at the time?

Yes, he was married. He lived in Campsie, and his wife was Evelyn. I don't think they had

37:30 any children. Evelyn left the family fold before the end of the war, and I don't think anybody's seen her since, which is a bit of a shame. I think she lives in Northern New South Wales, if she's still alive.

And your grandparents, your dad's parents, how did they take the news about his death?

The grandfather died in 1937, so he died before the war, and the grandmother, who was a great lady, my Nanna, she was

38:00 very 'cut' about it. But once again, I was a six or seven year old, I wasn't.…They lived across the way, and we subsequently moved into that family house, in the late '40s, in Haberfield, but she was very 'cut' up, I know, as was the whole family. He was a favourite, he was the 'youngie', and he put his age up and everybody worried about him. He was just a great guy. I can't claim to have known him terribly well, but I can still see his face. So that's not bad. I wouldn't have seen him since I was five, so yeah.…

38:30 **You mentioned in respect to your father, that he was in a protected industry. Did he have any desire to….**

I'm not aware of it. I mean, I almost feel he should have, to protect his memory, but I think it was the grain trade, and they were pretty involved. I don't know what the Argentinean relationship was, because the Germans got involved in Argentina. But he

39:01 became chairman of the wheat board. He probably wasn't as important then, but no, he respected Roy, and I think he probably felt that, maybe, he was fit enough to be there, and maybe he should be there. It's interesting, he was a discipline type and he was certainly a great sportsman, but I don't know of any great longing that he felt deprived by not having been there. I hope I don't sell him short on that.

39:30 **Did you have anyone from the family that was in World War 1?**

I don't think so. I'm the eldest son of the eldest son and I've got the family bible downstairs. No, I don't think so. They came from Scotland but they were here.…I'm pretty sure, no. Even a very big family, too. There must have been some

40:00 cousins or uncles of the family, but I have no direct knowledge of it, and yet I'm history minded, both with the family…That's the first time I've been asked the question, and I haven't even considered it.

We'll pause right there.

Tape 2

(makes reference at start of tape to having Super 8 film from Vietnam and Malaya)

00:41 **Just coming back to World War 11, what are some of your memories of that period?**

The sinking of the Repulse, almost a kitchen cabinet, a war cabinet in our house in Haberfield. The sinking of the Repulse and the Prince of Wales off Singapore,

01:02 in December, '41, and my father looking worried. In fact, I went off to the country, along with a lot of people. I wasn't evacuated as such, but I did live in the bush for about two or three years, and went to school in the bush, with a close friend of my father's from school, his family. Very close, they're almost like a second family these days.

01:30 But part of that would have been a worry about the midget submarines in Sydney, I think. I've never had that stated openly, but why did I suddenly take off from school at the age of about seven or eight.…1942, I'm six or seven, and I then went to school in the country at a place called Mirrool, brilliant place, on the edge of the Riverina. So that might have been

02:00 part of the exodus from Sydney, which seems incredible in retrospect. But that's how seriously people thought about the war. I think that was the main reason. And my sister and I both stayed up there on a property, for years.

So when the news about the Repulse came in, do you remember that actual day that your father heard the news?

I do. I remember just my mother and father and me, sitting on a kitchen

02:30 stool, discussing the seriousness. And Singapore hadn't fallen obviously, but it was a big blow, the actual sinking of the Repulse and the Prince of Wales, which was a marvellous fluke by the Japanese from Phuket, I think it was. They were at maximum range when they just sighted the ships and destroyed. That showed the stupidity of the British lack of intelligence, and led to the downfall of Singapore soon after, because they just didn't believe

03:00 that the Japanese had the capability. Talk about the greatest underestimation by intelligence of a force, ever. The guns facing the wrong way in Singapore. I don't know whether that's an apocryphal story or not, but I think it's possible. I'm not a Winston Churchill fan.

Given that you were so young, do you remember your family receiving news that the war has broken out?

I can't say that I do. I certainly remember the end of the war,

03:30 the celebrations. Because our car was stolen while we were in at the march. So that's 1945. So I would say that my first cogent recognition of it was the sinking of the Prince of Wales. And that's not bad, for a kid to have known that, sixty something years ago. I certainly was aware of the hushed tone, so it must have had a big impact on the adult population. The kids

04:00 still played 'hopscotch' and 'marbles' and ran off to school. I don't think any of us ever thought that we were going to be invaded. But obviously that many people did. And there's no doubt there were 'Brisbane Lines' and 'MacArthur's stand' and the whole bit, subsequently. There was a degree of….I wouldn't call it panic, I would call it foreboding, that would have been the mood in that kitchen, and I think it's December '41.

04:32 **Can you share with us your memories of the end of the war, and the story of the car being stolen?**

KUO 66, it was a 'Chev Roadster' [Chevrolet]. It was a 1936 'Chev'. We went into Martin Place and I remember the celebrations. I think there was a sort of celebration in May, '45, which was Victory in Europe Day, but of course we were facing the Pacific War still and Hiroshima and

05:00 Nagasaki were just a 'blip' on the screen at that stage. But I remember the euphoria, because it was actually my father's birthday, VE Day. I don't know that that was a major celebration in Sydney. But certainly VP Day, which was close to my birthday. My birthday was the 17th of August. I think Victory in Pacific Day was the 16th of August, or very close to it. Long Tan was the 18th of August, later on in Vietnam.

05:31 But yes, it was a wild celebration. The 'dancing man', I fancy, I almost saw the 'dancing man'. I've seen it so often in my films since, I probably didn't. We then went to go home and I can't remember whether the car was actually near the city, or in the suburbs, which would have been worse in Sydney in 1945, for a car to be stolen from the suburbs. I think it might have been parked near

06:00 the city, and we possibly walked. Otherwise, why was the car out? But it was just unbelievable. For a start, it possibly couldn't be locked because it had side curtains and a 'canvas' [roof]. You didn't lock motor cars. I think probably people left the keys in them. I'm sure my father would have had the keys out of them. But I remember the stupid registration number. KU0 66. It had a 'dicky' seat, I think. You sat in the back of it for fun. Except when

06:30 it was running, it wasn't fun. And you'd lie up the back, so it was a single-seater, and there was room for a child aged anything up to about seven, to lie up the back. It was a very economical use of space. I'm not even sure about the 'dicky' seat, I think it might have been an earlier car. So a 1936 Chev Roadster, I think it was called. Very flash, but not so flash by 1945. But still we were just stunned that anyone would take one of your possessions, particularly on a day of celebrations.

07:00 It was a big watershed. So I'm eleven, then.

So given the euphoria of VE Day and all the events that happened, what was your father's response coming back and not finding the car?

I think dumbfounded, like when you can't find your car in the car park, I suspect. And then probably very angry. But he was….not a placid man, but he didn't shout and rave and scream, so I don't have too much detail in my mind about it all, It was

07:30 just unbelievable and I don't recall what happened. I don't recall what we got to replace it. He subsequently did actually have company cars later on, but they were almost unknown in 1945, and he

probably wasn't senior enough. We certainly had a company car, because it was a yellow 'Austin', a 'Baby Austin', in about 1950. Then it got to be flash 'Plymouths' and things. The 'Austin' might have even been 1948. So we might have gone without a car for two or three years, possibly, I suspect,

08:01 because to start with, they looked for it for about six months. You probably couldn't write them off in those days. Insurance wouldn't pay until they were sure it was stolen. I think it was a pretty rare occurrence in 1945. It sounds like a different world, doesn't it? It was.

You spoke with great reverence of Jimmy Gordon, that hush when he came into the household. Just as a boy, you and your mates at school

08:30 **during the war, did you grow up with stories from the war [World War 1]? Great heroes like Jimmy Gordon?**

Yeah, I think….I've got to be careful. I think it was James Gordon. I have another friend who is an architect named Jimmy Gordon. I think he was James Gordon, but then he wouldn't have been called James in an infantry battalion, would he? I've got to make sure I've got that name right, but I'm pretty sure. I said reverence, but it was his reverence for Roy,

09:00 and I think I used that term in the sense of an ambience atmosphere about death, and I related it to Gallipoli and subsequent experience in Gallipoli last year. So I think I'm saying 'reverence for the dead', if you like, and for heroism. James or Jimmy was a pretty down to earth digger, and I suspect not terribly well educated. But a very good raconteur and

09:30 observer of life. I don't think there was too much of that. I think that was a very personal and particular thing. I don't recall up to 1945, too many other….We were pretty busy. The kids didn't really notice. I was possibly aware as anyone, at least because of Roy. But I don't remember being worried about Tobruk [Siege of, March to November 1941] or 'Alamein' [battle of El Alamein, October 1942]

10:00 or even the Japanese advance per se, it didn't really penetrate. I was at a 'smart school' at Haberfield, a demonstration school, and I went to Grammar in '46, so I was there in '45 at Haberfield…I had come back from the bush by then. I think we led a pretty selfish kid-happy existence. There was rationing, petrol rationing. Certainly up in Mirrool rationing didn't matter. We had

10:30 cattle and pigs and sheep, and I don't remember hardship or great austerity. Although I do remember mother counting coupons out, and almost borrowing coupons at some stage for food. So it was serious, but certainly not in a foreboding sense that we were all going to be Japanese or German, and interred or killed. Life went on, I'm afraid. We were callow youths.

11:02 **What are your memories of the country when you went there?**

A very big influence on my life. He was a very good farmer, Alex Gemmell. He had a fairly big holding. Dry country, about a twelve inch rainfall at the most. Sheep and wheat. I remember he became a pioneer. He actually contour-ploughed his farm.

11:31 In other words he dug up his paddocks, the ones on the hills, and put contours in. Now I think that's possibly post war, because there weren't so many new tractors around. But he was an advanced thinker. Why would you not crop a field, when you're creating all these furrows? The people, I had a ball there, I made a lot of good friends, and

12:00 we're still very close to that family. I learnt a lot that stood me in good stead for the rest of my life. Practical. Apart from the fact that they used to put me on the tractor and work the 'daylights' out of me. There was also a war-time pilot, he must have been convalescing, a squadron leader, who worked on the farm, and there were also Italian prisoners of war. That's right, yes. Not on our farm, but on his brother's farm,

12:30 they employed Italians. Aldo, I remember Aldo. And they were just treated like houseguests. It must have been the most marvellous life for prisoners. That's an interesting thing….I was quite close to that situation. He came and visited them after the war, the Gemmell family, the prisoner, he came back about twenty years later to talk about his marvellous life. Thank God he was captured, I think, without selling the Italians short in their 'reverse action attacks' [retreating]. That changed

13:00 their lives, the prisoners. They weren't interned, they were Prisoners of War.

What do you remember of Aldo's stories surrounding him?

Very little. I just really recalled his name, and I've probably only talked about him once in the last forty years. It's just interesting that it comes out very vividly. Now.

13:30 I'm quite certain…I believe he was a Prisoner of War. We did intern people, didn't we? I'm sure. Certainly the Cowra breakout, they were internees. But I'm pretty sure he was captured, he was a soldier. He was just a lovely man, who loved spaghetti and loved having life on a farm. He had his own hut or a room or something. He probably never had it so good.

You mentioned earlier

14:00 **that rationing didn't really have much effect on the farm given that you had animals there.**

But did it have any impact?

Not to my knowledge. And I think I only know of it because I would have been sent to do the odd errand at the shops, from earlier times, by my mother. I didn't do any shopping for the farm. I mean, we were five miles from the nearest town. Temora and Griffith were the big towns, and that was a big expedition, once every

14:30 six months, I think.

The Americans. You came back in 1945 to go to school in Haberfield…

No, I think I was back as early as '43, or '44, I'm not sure. Sometime about that, a couple of year period.

Any memories of the Americans that obviously came here?

15:02 Very general. Maybe even being aware that all the girls got dressed up and went to Kings Cross or something, to meet the 'Yanks' [Americans]. I think I was aware of ships in, but I don't really remember American troops around the city. I don't think I was in the city much anyway. I don't remember seeing any Americans on VP Day.

15:32 I think there were marching troops that probably were Americans, but I'm not even sure I would have differentiated. That's a terrible comment for an infantry colonel.

Now, when you entered high school, you went to Fort Street for a short period of time?

No, I think it was on the books, but I didn't actually go there. My father went to Newington, [Newington College, Sydney] but he decided that the headmaster wasn't too 'whoops', so at the last minute, he used to have a few beers with some Grammar masters, and I

16:00 managed to get into Grammar, which was very difficult to do, on the basis of a few beers with the masters who were…..Not on sporting ability at that stage, although I had played representative rugby. My father had been a coach of a side. And interestingly there is four generations associated with that, because my daughter, father's grand-daughter, coaches a Drummoyne side now, and her son plays in a Drummoyne side, and my father coached a representative side when I first played representative rugby at about seven or eight,

16:30 at Drummoyne oval. And my son subsequently played, but not at Drummoyne oval, he played with my old club Randwick. And my daughter is now a coach of the under-eights, and she attended a 'Barbarian' lunch where Sally Loane was a guest speaker, and she talked about, "We've got a rugby coach in the audience," daughter, and her son who is now eight, is a 'winger' for the Drummoyne Club. And at one match there recently, I just looked up at the goalposts at Drummoyne and I thought 'That's a long tradition'. Only my son has not

17:00 played here or played for them. I think that's four generation, isn't it. That's my father, me, daughter and her son. That's four generations.

Sydney Grammar. What memories do you have of the school?

Oh, very good, strong academic school. Not as strong as it is now. My strongest memory is of sport.

17:31 I was captain of 'Grammar Eleven' and I was in GPS [Greater Public Schools] 'First' [team] Cricket. I got injured pretty early. The injuries are still hitting me. I was a fifteen year old fullback in Grammar First and got injured at the beginning of the second year. And I didn't play for GPS First Football, I did play for Thirds, but I only played one game after I'd broken my knee cap. The problem is they didn't know I had broken my knee cap, and rubbed a broken bone for six months. It was a good set-up.

18:00 Our family doctor was actually a gynaecologist. He wasn't too hot on knees. But he was a friend of my father's. In fact, I went to Duntroon late because they finally found out I had a broken knee cap. In January, and operated on in February, and that's why I wasn't allowed to play football, theoretically for twelve months. But I got to Duntroon and played football the next week. They said, "What papers?" [medical papers] The side needed a full back, so I went

18:30 and played representative rugby my first week, a few months after being operated on.

So how did you break the knee?

Oh, just in a tackle at a game. 'Grammar' were playing 'Kings' [The Kings School Parramatta], and 'Kings' had two fifteen-stone centres, and we had an inside centre who was a Thai blood brother of mine, but he didn't know how to spell the word 'tackle'. So on about the fifteenth tackle I did it to these big bastards. I didn't go off I don't think,

19:00 I actually went to the pictures that night with my girlfriend, and she was a nurse, fortunately, and I couldn't move by the time the film ended, so I guess….I don't think I went to hospital. Of course I didn't, because I just had water on the knee, according to the doctor, so there are photos of it with a knee this size, and I still played a game of football, later in the season, and played for GPS against Waverley. And then 'kept wicket' [wicket keeper] for GPS First, with a broken knee cap,

19:30 and actually scored a century. They only found out at Christmas, and it was operated on in January. I

went to Duntroon, late, in about April or May.

So was the knee inhibiting you at all in respect to…

Yeah, it's been a dead knee all my life, but I've managed to….I was reasonable sprinter. But I've managed to cope. Subsequently, when I was about fifty, I broke the other knee cap, in Fiji. And that also wasn't treated properly. The

20:00 great.…Sydney's best 'physio' was on the trip with us, for a conference in Fiji, and I actually finished the tennis match that I broke it in, and she just taped it up and said, "Get back, on the court now, you're right." The sweat was pouring out of me. Four days later when we got back to Sydney, she treated it, but I found it was broken and operated on, and in fact that was the one I had a total knee replacement, in the right. That was my good knee. I broke that one at fifty.

20:30 I broke the left one at fifteen. I'm keeping the wretched orthopaedic surgeons away from the one I broke when I was fifteen. That's got to be replaced as well. Parachuting didn't help at all, of course, and I subsequently smashed my shoulder pretty badly in Singapore, at later times, playing and coaching a Ghurkha side, and that's got to be replaced. I'll be pretty bionic by the time I'm seventy five; I'll have two titanium knees and a titanium shoulder.

21:02 I fly a lot and I cause a lot of problems with the electronic security.

You mentioned earlier that you started cadets late at Sydney Grammar?

Yes, I'm just trying to indicate that I wasn't the devoted, dedicated soldier from the cradle, I think. My own source of inspiration was more ethereal, or a bit sort of metaphysical, almost, was Uncle Roy.

21:30 And I don't even think he was Uncle Roy, because he was not much older than my sister. There were ten children in my father's family. So yes, I went late, almost when you had to. I was only in my last two years of school, then I repeated because I was fairly young. So I really on did three years of cadets. I was made a cadet at the end of the first year, then I was company commander, a reasonably senior cadet in my second year.

22:01 An interesting point of history, Alex Hill the historian, who was the cadet instructor and a teacher at Grammar, I was never one of his favourite characters. I think I was bit sort of 'wild' for him. When I came back after four years at Duntroon, to visit the school, he said, "Well, I always said you would make a soldier some day." But I had the last laugh. He's a beautiful old man. He's sort of like an elder statesman of history. He's married to a 'Chauvel', daughter

22:30 of Sir Harry. But when I was instructor of military history, he came on the staff at Duntroon, as a very mature student. And he sat in the back of the room while I taught military history, and he sat and nodded. He was a very distinguished man. Subsequently Bob O'Neill became the professor of history, but in the interim, Alec Hill was listening to my lectures on the American Civil War in military history, at Duntroon, to cadets,

23:00 including Peter Cosgrove.

What sort of things did you do on cadet camps?

Pretty mundane stuff, I think. I have a memory of a Singleton camp where you spent most of your time digging trenches to keep the water out of your tent. To be fair, it was probably good basic training, but nothing terribly exotic,

23:30 and certainly not terribly inspirational. There were the slightly 'broken down' sergeants and warrant officers from the regular army, whom I subsequently had a lot of contact with and a lot of regard for. Fellows like James Gordon were doing that cadet job later in life. I do believe that it was possible he was recommended for the VC [Victoria Cross] in the action that Roy was killed in, but

24:00 because no-one could recommend Roy and no-one else was around. I don't think he refused it, I don't think you can refuse it, but I've heard stories.…There was no-one else much alive in the platoon except him, he was platoon sergeant…

In cadet camp, you don't have….

No, not dramatic. I'd like to flesh it out for you. We certainly had a firing range, and fairly simple, clumsy

24:30 manoeuvres, but it wasn't terribly sophisticated. Mind you, military training is very hard to make realistic and to make interesting, and especially if you've got nothing but people going 'bang, bang'. Sometimes there were 'blanks' [blank ammunition], I think we probably had 'blanks' for the rifles in there. But you didn't really want to fire 'blanks', because they made a mess of your barrel and you had to spend about two or three hours cleaning the barrel.

25:00 No, it wasn't.…I have a picture of us, but I think…I suppose it's so familiar to me because I've been through it so often. It was basic platoon attacks and digging in and bivouacking and also lectures on hygiene and safety and health, and being a good citizen. The cadets did fill a good function, in it certainly trained kids who had never spent a night away from home. It got them out into the

25:30 big wide world for a week, at Singleton.

You spoke of rifles?

'Three oh threes' [.303 calibre rifle], the big heavy 'three oh threes'. We had those at Duntroon, and I think we had them in Malaya, too. In Vietnam I had an Armalite [.50 calibre rifle] and the soldiers by then had the 'seven point six two' [7.62 calibre rifle]. but the 'three oh three' [.303 calibre rifle]…which was a marvellous weapon, but it weighed like seven house bricks.

26:00 But it was a great weapon. It was pre World War 1, I think, certainly various versions of it, but a marvellous weapon and very reliable. And bolt action. As soon as you get your fancy automatic things and the soldier doesn't clean it, or the helicopters kick up mud and dust, they don't work, the sophisticated weapons. And the three oh three worked all the time. You just worked the bolt, and you had at least ten rounds in the magazine, and at least another ten rounds, always.

26:30 And they were great for drill, also. Great in the sense, if you were an officer, although you were usually carrying a sword then. But you could hit them hard and you could do movements. The other finicky little things, they were almost plastic. No-one could make precise movements with them. They looked like cheerleader groups, instead of proper soldiers.

With the 'three oh threes', these days society says, "No guns, no guns."

27:01 **But were you allowed to take these things home, or were they kept somewhere?**

I don't recall ever having them at home, thank heavens. There was at least that degree of security. You drew your weapon from the armoury, it was downstairs at 'Grammar'. And it was pretty good security, when you think of how many weapons are loose on the streets these days. There wouldn't have been sophisticated electronic alarms on the armouries. The armouries would have been fair game,

27:30 but the criminals weren't so aggressive or dramatic. Maybe they had their own supply anyway. And of course, hand guns are more useful for criminals than rifles. And there weren't too many handguns around. I think we had a Smith & Wesson thirty eight [.38 calibre hand gun]. You couldn't hit a barn at five yards with them. They were useless, and not great at stopping. They weren't the big Lugers and Mausers [German heavy pistol]. We were issued with those right up until I was a major. Smith and Wessons…

28:00 I had one company commander, who carried one in Vietnam. He carried a pistol on his belt. He didn't like to have too much encumbrance. He felt that he wasn't going to be in long….Whereas I used a weapon that I had in Vietnam, I used it, I needed it a couple of times. And he was an adjacent company commander. His attitude was, "What's the use of having a rifle? It's all over if I've got to use a rifle."

28:33 In a way, he was right, with minor exceptions. No, there are times when you needed a weapon that could go at least a hundred metres, or preferably had a big stopping power at about twenty metres, with a sniper in a tree.

You're coming to the end of school. What thoughts did you have in respect to the future of what you wanted to be?

29:03 My father was quite encouraging in terms of a commercial career, particularly as he worked for a very good company. I could have actually done a cadetship in 'Bunge', in Argentina. And I seriously considered it. That was the firm. And in fact, interestingly, I am leaving next week to go to South America, and I will be in Argentina for the first time. A much delayed ambition for rugby. Also they were a great

29:30 rugby nation. I don't think they're so hot now. My sister did medicine, very much against his wishes. It was just the time, women didn't cut up naked bodies and things. He wasn't a reactive conservative, he just didn't want his daughter exposed to the terrible world, I suppose. She was very determined. She was at a school that didn't even do

30:00 physics and chemistry. She went to 'Fort Street' temporarily, but she left after a couple of days and went back to the Methodist Ladies College in Annesley, in Bowral, which now doesn't exist. She got coaching over Christmas for her first year of medicine and she got a distinction and a credit in physics and chemistry, first year medicine, at the end of the year. So that just shows you what a determined person can do. But she did that against my father's desire. He didn't forbid it, and we weren't

30:30 wealthy. And I mean it was a big chore also, to pay for it. But he was keen for me to do medicine, because in the 1960s and things, medicine had a very high status, as it does now, and a high earning power. I think that was what he was thinking, or 'commercial'. But my decision to go Duntroon, I didn't really consult my parents. I listened, but I didn't really consult. It was almost an impulse to go to the Royal Military College. I had started at

31:00 Sydney University, and I had a Commonwealth scholarship in engineering. I fiddled about with the concept of pharmacy. I was a pretty typical sixteen or seventeen year old. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think I had a sense of history….One of my colleagues said all the great men of history have been military men, and that was his motive. A year later, from school, he went to Duntroon, a year after me. And he always stated that as a

31:30 an aim. I couldn't confess to that lofty aim. I was pretty sure there was a war coming and I decided I would do it properly. I would be a professional soldier. It was almost as pragmatic as that. There was a fair bit of idealism somewhere in amongst it.

You father expressed view to you of where he would like to see you go. Did your mum say anything?

Oh yes, first of all, she didn't want me to be in the military, but that is a typical mother's thing. In fact, my son, subsequently,

32:01 at one stage, I sent him, because he didn't know what he was going to do, I sent him to do the ADFA [Australian Defence Force Academy] entrance exam, just as a sort of a test to him. He said, "I don't want to join the army. You can get killed." It was a very sensible decision. But he does understand a lot of what happened. He got exposed to a very interesting day in 1987 about Vietnam that we might touch on, because that was a very interesting day in the history of Australia.

32:30 And his reactions and others of his age, that day, were most interesting.

Just in respect to what you said, you said you were coming to the end of your schooling, and it seemed as a seventeen year old that World War Three was sort of inevitable…

Imminent.

Imminent….

The question that I had for you was

33:00 **Korea was coming, the Korean War, did you know anything in that respect as you were coming towards the end of school?**

Yes, the Korean War was on, well and truly. The Korean War started in 1950. And I left school at the end of '51. I was too young to do whatever…I didn't know what I wanted to do anyway. I think I was fifteen when I did the leaving certificate the first time. So, Korea was in the mind, and being a cadet…I still wasn't a militaristic…I wasn't 'goose-stepping' [marching] around the place.

33:31 I was very much a normal, casual, sport-mad kid. And I was smart enough to be able to get through exams without doing too much work. So, I hadn't really been challenged intellectually. That was because I didn't do enough work for it. So, the motivation….Why are we talking about Korea? Are you

34:00 saying that is the motivation?

Did that have bearing upon your thinking?

It certainly did to going there, but most of it was in the wider embrace of world domination by…The Menzies government were very clever, the 'Yellow Peril'. A little like 'the Tampa' and refugee things now used by

34:30 governments to make the…..We're a really great happy-go-lucky country. I don't think it's necessarily wrong to get people at least aware of the problems. I don't think you should panic. There was a definite fear…There was a 'domino theory', and it was rife, and the dominoes are going to fall with Communism coming south. And Yellow Peril is a bad racist tag to be talking about the Chinese moving. I mean, the

35:00 Chinese are so powerful, they will dominate the world at various stages, anyway. They are the next super power, obviously. And so Korea, as a specific example, it was part of the wider context of a World War Three, which was going to be nuclear. You see, there was no doubt in our minds that nuclear…And I've argued this quite recently, actually as recently as yesterday, that nuclear proliferation was inevitable. The Pakistanis have just

35:30 assisted it dramatically. You are always going to be able to buy bombs in the marketplace in Morocco, or Tangiers, or Kabul now, or maybe even Islamabad. But so it is in that context of a global war, not just a local war, so therefore be a professional.

Prime Minister Menzies,

36:00 **you mentioned earlier, came to the school. Can you tell me more about his 'Call', if you like?**

No, I hope I didn't say he came to the school, but he was behind the 'Call To The Nation' which was with the churches of Australia, I suspect all churches, probably Catholic and Protestant, but particularly the Anglican church, and it was an unmitigated political, religious, inspirational call. And I remember

36:30 the afternoon light in the Grammar big school room, and listening and being stirred by it. It was in fact a fellow who had been a former ambassador to Rome. I think his name might have been Kennedy. So he was just one of a number of speakers that the government and the churches…I think the actual thing was called 'Call To The Nation' and it was a very passionate,

37:01 'defend Christian moral values', totally woven into the political agenda, and certainly not separation of church and state, which I determinedly believe is very important, in a democracy, particularly. So it did

influence me, to an extent. And it became, I guess when I was frustrated at Sydney University, early in 1952, and not able to play football, and thinking of the long academic haul ahead,

37:31 I would go to Duntroon where you play sport and have fun. The fact there is great academic content in Duntroon, I 'fell out of the frying pan and into the fire'. As I said earlier, I am a closet academic. I tried to attend the Military College of Science at one stage, when I was an infantry major, and my mentor said, "Don't ruin your career with this pussy-footing stuff. You are an infantry man. Don't go to the Military College of Science." And I didn't, but I tried very hard to do it. And I did do a degree

38:00 at ANU [Australian National University]. Subsequently I did the honours degree. I didn't write the thesis because I left the army, but I did pass at an honour's level, at great inconvenience, over a six or eight year period, in between being in Vietnam. And this was a very interesting time with discontent in Australia, and I was appearing at ANU, with people like….Richard Butler, Professor Desmond Ball, Professor Robert O'Neill,

38:30 who was a conservative, and they were my examiners and mentors and tutors, and some of them were very radical, and some were not. And some of the students discussed whether they would blow up Black Mountain Tower, with Professor Ball alongside me, who had actually worked at the Defence Department, but Sir Arthur Tange got a bit unhappy with him. He was a card carrying member of the Communist Party. He was a 'Trotskyite'. And we used to sit and discuss things, earnestly. And I would be in my major's uniform from Duntroon, having slipped out of lecturing cadets to be over in this hothouse

39:00 of ANU, with almost-terrorists in the canteen. And they talked and they didn't even worry about me being in uniform. Well, they did, I think, eventually. I tried not to be in uniform on the campus, sometimes, so I could glean more information if you like.

So if I understand the time correctly, just before you went to Duntroon, you were actually at Sydney Uni?

Yes, briefly. Well, I was enrolled in engineering

39:30 at Sydney Uni, but I had had the knee operation and I don't remember attending many lectures or anything. I defected and went to Duntroon, very early on in that first term. I don't ever regret that. I had a marvellous military career, and I had a marvellous commercial career since. And I'm still having a marvellous career as a consultant at the ripe old age of sixty nine.

Excellent. We'll pause there.

Tape 3

01:04 **What were your first impressions on arriving at Duntroon in 1952?**

Oh, shock, horror. Pretty tough, it was a pretty tough place. And also, I was late, and therefore I had been spared some of the unspeakable 'cruelty' that was inflicted on the new cadets to

01:32 make them part of the system. Impolitely known as 'bastardisation.' Subsequently as a staff member I was involved in some of the discussions that the media had, and appeared on an ABC Checkerboard program about that. But those first days were very….I think shocking is the right word. Not in a physical sense, but nothing prepares you for

02:00 a pretty disciplined, stern regime that is intent on knocking the pretensions of schoolboy 'heroes' out the door. And to a point I believe that the aim is correct. That obviously goes bad in the execution, because of a few stupid fellows. It's always the minority that over-reach.

02:30 But generally excitement as well about a whole new world, and very impressed with the curriculum, both from an academic and military point of view. I found very little fault with the syllabus over the four years and the system was…I obviously coped pretty well with the system because I prospered in it.

03:01 I kept my radicalism, contained.

What was shocking about the discipline? What was it that was difficult to get used to?

Oh, the extreme punishments that involved you being on the square. An enormous requirement to get up at four o'clock in the morning, to be ready, so that you were immaculate to do the defaulters parade at six o'clock.

03:32 And there was a dread, in a sense, more of the actual thought than of the execution. You were on the parade with a regimental sergeant major, who was a great character, 'Fango' Watson, and he inspired terror in all the cadets. But he really was a loveable character, as we found out later on. So it was fear of the unknown, a bit, but it was also practically

04:00 that your time was precious, and if you got into trouble, you had a lot more things to do in whatever free time you might have thought you had. And you had fellows up, cleaning their gear at midnight, secretly. Your lights were supposed to be out at ten o'clock or something, and fellows would be under

their blankets cleaning their brass and making sure their boots were…It was a bit of the stupid, old discipline, and this is still ’52 to ’55 we’re talking about. But it

04:30 wasn’t too bad, and it wasn’t as bad as it used to be. It never is. The system wasn’t totally stupid.

When you say the system was set up to knock the schoolboy illusions out of you, who was the focus of that? Was it the RSM? [Regimental Sergeant Major] Or the seniors class?

Probably the senior class, and they’re the class above actually, so it was just those three years ahead of you.

05:00 But it wasn’t…There was no physical brutality. There might have been the odd accident, but it was more…And there were quite harmless things, too. People were forced to…They flooded bathrooms. You had ‘Olympics’ or something, and you had people forced to swim in bathrooms that were flooded. One very famous character in academia was reduced from sergeant major to staff cadet, because he supervised one of these

05:30 performances. We were all part of this system, but not. It was getting almost okay by that period. It subsequently got a bit worse again, when I was involved in the investigations.

I’m not going to dwell on this, but were you initiated at all into the Duntroon system, having arrived late?

Oh, yes, yes. And even a couple of creatures in my own class made certain that my life was a little more difficult than it

06:00 might have been. But fortunately, or unfortunately, I was in the first fifteen within a week, and I had a few protectors. It gets a bit tribal, too. But there was nothing that was too dramatic. If you wrote it all down on paper, it would look hideous. Crawling through mud and under barbed wire and….As part of extra curricular activities. You did that damn well, anyway, in your physical training and battle training.

06:30 But it was just some extra things, but very little. A degree of sadism because there’s some of that in every group of four hundred people, because some blokes can’t quite cope and therefore they’ve got to be bullies. But generally speaking, it wasn’t…I’m not scarred for life, I’m pretty normal.

Were there blokes who were a bit scarred by this new environment?

Probably. And some who left. Oh yes. The attrition rate is

07:00 very high. Some of it is academic, some of it military failures, but some of it psychological. And it is necessary….All institutions did it, of course. Universities and…And they all still do it, I’m sure. Some form of initiation, which might just be a lecture, if you like. But there are various degrees of training people. In the military’s case, or particularly in the colleges, it was bringing people to…if you like, a

07:30 lowest common denominator, so they could then build up again their initiative and confidence. So the principle is right. But only up to a point.

To what extent was that principle condoned by the establishment? You had a different experience later, as an instructor, was it something that they…

Oh, certainly, yes. Condoned is a correct word. Not encouraged, as such, but certainly not

08:00 stamped out. Except with occasional exposures from the media.

What was the official discipline like, then? If you separate the senior classes from the….

Very strict, extremely strict. This was just an ancillary thing. And I mean, we’re talking about at meal times, and there is not much time for people to get at each other, and there was study for at least two or three hours a night. So official discipline was very strict, by any standards,

08:30 but not ridiculous.

There is a great story about ‘Fango’ Watson, that his voice could be heard on a clear day, from the other side of Canberra. Is that something that you recall?

Oh yes, that’s almost possible. I had a pretty good relationship with him, even as a cadet. He was subsequently commissioned, and I knew him then. And he lived near my sister and her husband in Canberra. He became a friend.

09:01 **Can you explain for the Archive what the role of the RSM is in a military academy?**

In a military academy, it’s very much the focal point, if you like, discipline and all. What some people would say, the mindless drill and marching. And he’s a figurehead. And it’s almost the same in a battalion. You have a commanding officer and a regimental sergeant major and there’s no doubt the commanding officer runs the battalion, but the regimental sergeant major

09:31 runs the battalion NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and the ‘Diggers’ and is much closer to the action, and probably alerts the commanding officer, if he is a good one, as a conduit for both problems and good things. In a military academy, because there is so much emphasis, if you like, on ‘spit and

polish', then he's almost higher in profile. But it's all fairly much show. He doesn't influence the curriculum.

10:00 It's all pretty well supervised by boards of study, as a branch of a university, these days, or degree granting institutions. But then it was not a degree granting institution. It was getting to become an academic institution.

What did you find yourself out on morning parade for? What did you get in trouble for in those early days?

I was pretty smart at avoiding trouble, but I still got…Little things, like just incorrectly dressed, which could mean

10:31 almost nothing, anything. But I did get into strife. On the football field, in our third year of the college, I was actually captain of the side later that year, another fellow and I, who became a cabinet member under Malcolm Fraser [Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister of Australia], were late back at night

11:00 from a hotel in Wagga, on a trip, and we were confined to barracks, which meant that, yes, you did extra drills. But the trouble is that they were on the…And it was the rugby coach that put us on, and he was also my company commander, and we attended the square, then we had to leave with all this terrible gear on, get changed, and get down to rugby training, where the coach would speak nicely to me because I was really running the team. It sounds ridiculous that this fellow…We hated his guts, actually, but

11:30 he could separate one from the other, we couldn't say, "Why would you do that to us on a rugby trip?" But he felt he had to do it as a disciplinary action. We were just chatting up some girls, I'm sure, at the Romano's Hotel in Wagga.

Apart from arriving late, or badly dressed, what rules were commonly broken at Duntroon?

People went AWOL, Absent Without Leave. Either

12:00 to see their girlfriends or to go to Sydney, which was even more daring. Because you weren't allowed to leave, you weren't allowed to drink. In my fourth class [first year], you weren't allowed out in Canberra other than in your blue ceremonial uniform. You got out on a Saturday night, after sport, from six, and you had to be back at midnight. You went to the pictures, and you went out with your girlfriend, in a blues uniform with a tie or something. It was a stiff collar, and you almost couldn't turn your head in your uniform.

12:30 Which was a bit strange in the '50s, but it's much more relaxed now. We accepted it, though. And then I suppose some people actually went out illegally in sports clothes or something. Which was another offence in itself. Crazy. But you only got ten shillings a week, you got ten shillings in cash. You had an account book, but by the time you brought cigarettes and boot polish and

13:00 a Mars bar, you had almost spent your money. There wasn't much scope for….Drinking was forbidden, of course. But people did go to pubs, and got caught in pubs and got dismissed from the college for being in a bar, some of them.

What was Canberra like in the 1950s?

There was no lake to start with. And very provincial. It was a country town of twenty thousand people, then. It's a country town

13:30 three hundred and fifty thousand or something now. It's still a country town. Absolutely ghastly. There were cadets who fraternised with the locals, and cadets who didn't. There were some nice girls in Canberra, but we had girlfriends in Sydney, so we didn't….We sort of just kept manly pursuits until term time. You didn't get home until August, I think, from that first year.

14:00 Others did fraternise. But there was a strong….The college was totally isolated, in a sense, from Canberra. As a footnote, it's interesting that I've attended two institutions that were founded by Lord Kitchener. One in a desolate area on the Afghan border. In 1908, he founded the British Indian Army Staff College at Quetta,

14:30 and then on the same trip he came to Australia and found one of the most revolting places he could find, with climate and everything, with the idea of asceticism and keeping people away from the population, and having focused minds. Well, he misjudged because he chose Duntroon as the site for the Royal Military College, but he didn't know the 'fleshpots' of Canberra were growing to grow up and become suburbs. Duntroon was a suburb of Canberra. So

15:00 Kitchener would turn in his grave if he knew. The ACT is now the sex industry centre of Australia. Kitchener badly miscued there.

What about mixing with the local population? Did the RMC play rugby in the local competition?

Very much so, and very unpopular because we used to win easily, and we won the premiership, with ease. It's a mark of Canberra's brilliant growth of rugby that now Duntroon doesn't even play in the

competition.

15:30 They're not good enough to play in the first grade competition. But in those days, we had very good teams. Limited numbers. We probably only had twelve good rugby players. We converted players from hockey and Aussie Rules. We used to play hockey, Australian Rules, rugby, soccer….But in rugby we were very strong, and it was part of our unpopularity. The cadets

16:00 were regarded as arrogant. Part of that was being dressed up like 'pox doctors' clerks', but also not very good at fraternising with the local population. Most had been to non-coed schools and girls were still a bit of a mystery to us.

How important was sport, in the training that you received at Duntroon?

Many people would say too important. But it was only in tune with those times. It was

16:30 important, as a physical, rugged aspect. PT, of course, comes under that category. Physical Training. It was important and I believe it should have been. It might have been a bit over-stressed. There was maybe ten per cent too much emphasis on sport, rather than cultural activities, or more intense academia.

Can you give us an idea of what you learned at Duntroon?

17:00 **What the training consisted of? There was an academic side and a military side…**

It wasn't so rigidly separated as it is today. But we did English Literature, with the brilliant Professor Bryan. I had a very good….Sandy Philips, the headmaster of Sydney Grammar was very good. He got me interested in Shakespeare and writers. But I certainly had a very good, almost classical education. I was originally in the

17:30 engineering group, but Professor Sutherland, who was a dominant figure, the director of academic study reckoned I deliberately failed exams, to get out of the engineering group, but I didn't. I was a science graduate, subsequently, like the second tier. And the Arts students were regarded as the sort of ruffians of the group, but they were the characters, mostly. Engineering and science was a hybrid sort of thing.

18:01 And I subsequently did an Arts Honours degree at ANU. But I did have a mathematical, scientific bent. It was pretty tough. The physics and the chemistry and the pure sciences and applied science, applied mathematics. History, there was a good emphasis on history. Some cultural sort of stuff, too. As a cadet, I'm not sure we had it, but there was a subject, even when I was a company commander

18:30 subsequently, a subject called Social Etiquette, which we actually taught. Almost how to set a table, which sounds pathetic, but a lot of these kids came from 'back blocks' [poor backgrounds]. One of the other good things about this, and Sydney Grammar, was there was no….The ethnic, demographic, economic backgrounds were all diverse. There was no 'snob' element if you like. It was straight ability, both

19:01 Grammar and Duntroon. Which I'm very grateful for.

What about the military side of the training? Can you give us an idea of what that consisted of?

Yes, it was pretty much an extension of school cadet training, that sounds terrible, but it was rifle ranges, and camps and firing three inch mortars, firing artillery. There were, towards the end, specialist techniques, probably just in your last year, when you knew

19:30 what corps you were going to go to. What arm of the military. But you were basically designed…It would have been like basic training for the private soldier. It wasn't too fancy. A private soldier does about sixteen weeks basic training at a recruit training academy. I suppose across three years we did the equivalent of that. So it was pretty down to earth stuff. In theory, we did strategy and tactics in the classroom, but

20:00 when you said military, I immediately thought of field training and bivouacking.

Warfare was changing at the time. The Korean War was on when you first arrived at Duntroon. How much was the military tactics and strategy that you were being taught

20:30 **coming from the Korean experience or….**

I would like to say it was. And some of our instructors had been in Korea, but the military tradition has always been 'train for the last war', and not the next one. And I'm afraid we were not much of an exception. I know that we certainly incorporated Vietnam and Indo-China into my time later as an instructor. There are, of course, some pretty fundamental principles. I mentioned that I taught the Civil War. The American Civil War

21:00 is still one of the best examples of military training tactics and strategy, and it is still taught in academies, I believe. So there are some timeless things that emphasise the principles very well, but a lot of it….Some of our manuals were actually World War 1 manuals. I mean it was "copse, thicket,

hedge, machine gun over right."

21:30 When I went to France, subsequently, and travelled the battlefields of France, I realised that we trained for the battlefields of France. I sort of knew it at the time. It was nothing to do with jungle. So it was not Asian oriented training. And that's not surprising in 1952, even though Korea was on. Most of the experience of the people was in Europe, or some of it in World War 11 in Asia, but of it was very classical doctrine.

22:01 Of course there is a long lead time, and even preparing pamphlets, I know a pamphlet on training took two or three years to write, and possibly another year to get published. So you're four years behind time already. In some cases, we were forty years behind time. Some of it was 'fundamental truths', but it could have been updated. And the instructors would have liked it to have been, because they were more aware.

22:32 In summary, some modernisation and some innovation…I'm not saying it was deadly dull, or misdirected, but a lot of it was out of date.

Who were the instructors or staff figures that most inspired you, or were mentors to you, during that time?

You mean by name? Colonel Hassett was the CO,

23:00 He was the Director of Military Art responsible for all military training. I think he was a full colonel, he got promoted. He had been a lieutenant colonel for seventeen years. He was a very bright young colonel in World War 11. So he was one. The commandant was a fellow called Ron Hopkins. He was a typical old World War 11 cavalryman. A nice man, pleasant.

23:31 General Ian Campbell was his successor, and he had surrendered two battalions, in Crete in World War 11. The only Australian to have surrendered a couple of battalions. He was a gentle old man. They were figurehead types. Field Marshall Slim, who I've already mentioned in my synopsis, was a great inspiration. He was the governor general at Yarralumla. In fact, he got us to help proof read…What a man. He got cadets from the senior class, a few of us, to help proof read his 'Defeat IntoVictory'

24:00 which is one of the great books of World War 11, and he gave us chapters of it to read. He was a great inspiration, as a well known warrior. There were some pretty good younger guys. The adjutant Jimmy Sheldon, was a captain adjutant, and he became a brigadier, and I see a fair bit of him still. He's written a history. He's written a book on Korea actually, with David Butler.

24:32 Austin Chapman was my company commander. He was an engineer. He was the son of General John Chapman, he was a pretty good guy. I had a pretty good, healthy respect for them….The NCOs were very important in our lives, too And one of them George Chinn, was a sergeant, and he was subsequently RSM of the 6th Battalion over in Vietnam. We had a lovely relationship with those guys. We were all young hotshots, and we knew nothing, and we didn't pretend, while they were our drill sergeants. Later on,

25:00 when we were in jobs where we had to get their help occasionally. The sensible young officers always got advice from the sergeants and warrant officers, if they were sensible. If they pretended to know it all, they would soon get cut down. So it was very good. Of course, the staff at Duntroon are hand picked, pretty well. So it was a nice relationship, although at the time we probably thought they were

25:30 all bastards, of course. It was very good for me when I went back on the staff, that the cadets thought the officers really knew nothing, and were out of touch. I kept reminding myself of when I was young enough to believe that, and know that whatever I said, was going to be filtered pretty solidly. But you then had to get a way to get their attention.

You obviously had a lot of respect for the figures, like General Hassett. What were the qualities that made them good mentors, do you think?

Hassett was a mentor.

26:01 Slim wasn't a mentor because he would have barely have known me, but Hassett did mentor me a bit, and I did work for him later in Army headquarters. I think a lot of it was reputation, because he had been a commanding officer in Korea, and he had a DSO [Distinguished Service Order]. So, yes, I'm not saying they were aloof. I did get to know them well, particularly in the senior year, as an under officer.

26:30 But once again, rugby was an entrée for me, they were all interested in rugby. And so I was captain. I suppose, 'bearing and condition and reputation'. Some of them were pretty decent communicators, which a lot of people think the military aren't. Decent and understated, they were very good

27:00 communicators, both as lecturers and advisors, if you like.

A couple of more things about Duntroon. You mentioned before that it was during your time there that you became a bit obsessed with Indo-China and what was going on with the French there. Where did that obsession come from?

It was a bit remote. I would have been a bit unusual. I'm not sure when Graham Greene's The Quiet American was written. I suspect I read it there.

27:30 I might be being kind to him, because he wrote about the early ’50s. That period, but almost up to that time, I was there, so that might be a nice aberration of memory. Diem Bien Phu was in the headlines, the Indo-China campaign was in the headlines. It must have been reading. There was no real direct contact, in that

28:00 period, ’53, ’54, ’55. There was a book written called, ‘Street Without Joy’. The author eludes me, but I’m pretty sure that was later in my days on the staff. I have to differentiate my staff days, and they’re only eight years apart. I would hate to think that I was too clever. I think it was just osmosis, and the headlines…I must have been reading the newspapers pretty well. That is surprising because we didn’t have time to read the newspapers, but they were

28:30 in the library and maybe in the common room. I’m pretty sure it was relevant by 1954, ’55, to me.

Are there any other incidents or events that occurred during your time at Duntroon that still stand out as interesting?

Certainly there on the sporting field. I actually captained the side in 1954 when we beat GPS for the first time,

29:00 for five years. The Duntroon-GPS game was a classic game, which I am still campaigning to get re-introduced. All the pretty young girls of Sydney came to the game. It was a breeding ground for international rugby players. It was usually played at the showgrounds, what is now the Fox [movie studios] area. The Royal Agricultural Society Showground which was like the number two ground in Sydney. Occasionally it was played at the cricket ground, as a curtain raiser to international games. That was a lot of fun. So,

29:30 in 1954 I captained the side because the captain got ‘smashed’ [injured] the week before. I took over and I was a lowly staff cadet then, and I was promoted to lance corporal in the college the following week, and became an under officer the following year. People suggested it was the result of the football game, but that is denigrating the staff too much. I think they were just holding me back, as a future leader. Some of my friends were corporals in what was called second class, third year. And I was just

30:00 a late starter. And then I was ‘skipper’ the following year. The last time the game was ever played, we won both those games. And the headmaster at the GPS school said, “The big Duntroon boys are knocking us about, and we’re not going to play you any more.” But in fact it was a plot to get soccer. Soccer was getting a hold in the high schools. I subsequently learnt this from Sir Lesley Heron, who was chief justice of New South Wales, and also president of the rugby union. When I tried to get the game on in ’64, he confessed that’s why they sabotaged it.

30:30 So a couple of big sporting highlights, and then the graduation parade. When you graduated it was great, memorable…

Can you describe that for us? What happened on your graduation?

Oh, just sheer ecstasy. That’s the emotional side. First of all it’s a splendid parade. The graduating class march off separately. You command your companies…Do you mean the technical aspects of it?

Yeah, the whole thing. How you felt as well is very important.

It’s very interesting.

31:01 The graduating class then fall out of the ranks of the companies and they march aside, and then they march off to ‘Auld Lang Syne’. I get choked up now just thinking about it. And the rest of the college ‘presents arms’ to the departing class. A great graduation ball, which is always a marvellous climax. But no alcohol. I don’t know how that’s got around, but I know that General Hassett actually threw us out of the college the next day,

31:30 because we played up too much. We always maintained that we never graduated, we were thrown out by Hassett. I told him that recently. But there must have been alcohol at the ball. But there was not supposed to be. But great scenes of jubilation. We used to drive onto the square in cars. We did that in fourth class, so we got into a lot of trouble for that. I don’t know whether that was normal. But I’ve got photos of us

32:00 driving cars all over the parade ground, at five o’clock in the morning, with girls hanging out. The usual sort of hi-jinx. The speech, I have no idea who gave the speech. Menzies would have been there. Sir Josh Francis was the Minister for the Army. Menzies spoke to us a few times, during the years. I’m sure no prime minister would lecture these days, not even the current photo opportunity prime minister.

32:34 So they were memorable times, during many of those talks. But the whole atmosphere of jubilation and release and descending onto the world. I brought a red sports car outside the Newport Hotel, about twenty days after graduation, with my accumulated funds. It was bright red and shiny and it was waiting for me. It was a ‘Singer’. I got rid of it eight months later for

33:00 half the price that I paid for it. That’s the sort of euphoria that lasted for three weeks after the graduation parade, before we joined our unit. So, yeah, all in all a magnificent climax. I’m sure there are other significant things, but that is almost enough for Duntroon.

Once that euphoria had worn off, you're now graduated, the Korean War is over,

33:30 **you're trained to be a soldier, there is no war to go fighting, how did you feel about your career then?**

No problems in motivation, whatsoever. Once you get heavily involved with sport, I was playing first grade rugby, representative rugby in Sydney, and within reason I was able to do that. The army were reasonably helpful. Some of my colleagues were less than kind. They had to do duty officer for me.

34:01 Television had just started in sport. I played in the first televised game. Randwick versus Eastern Suburbs at Woollahra. And I remember we had to wear different coloured shorts, to differentiate from the opposition, because it was black and white television. No problem with motivation. The 'Diggers' were also motivated. Korea was only just over. There were plenty of…We were on standby. We were 'pincushions'.

34:31 Sometimes every six weeks, but not less than every three months, we were inoculated with things like plague, bubonic plague, typhus, cholera. We were 'pin cushions', because we were on stand-by. We always seemed to be on stand-by for somewhere. Laos rings a bell, I don't know why. Not Vietnam, specifically. You're never ready for the next war.

35:00 We were constantly being on the alert. I was in like a depot battalion. Fourth Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was like a depot for the other battalions. And certainly that continues through. That inoculation thing was probably more like when I was at 2RAR [2nd Royal Australian Regiment], subsequently, in the late '50s. Yes, that makes more sense. But anyway, I obviously

35:30 got hepatitis from a jab, because that's why I didn't go away with the footballers. The RAP [Regimental Aid Post] corporals, who consumed quite a bit of rum, used to take a needle and jab thirty people at a time, and occasionally they'd wipe their needles. I'm pretty certain that I got hepatitis from a needle on one our countless jabs. That was what was happening at that time. One other fellow got it in the Wallabies, John

36:00 Thornett. He at least went away with the team, he didn't play the first sixteen games, but he subsequently captained Australia. I never did kiss John Thornett in the dressing rooms, so we think my hepatitis came from military needles. So that aspect of hygiene was very bad, as it was in the community, I think, in the '50s. So, no problem with motivation at all. The Diggers were keen. Malaya was pretty

36:30 soon on the horizon. I have to think.…Yes. So there were people going away. The Australian Army was constantly involved in operations, I think, from 1947 through to.…With more than one or two units overseas. The Australian public didn't know this. Sometimes they weren't battalions, sometimes they were just outfits in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indian tribal

37:00 border areas. But we always had a lot of things going on, and rotation of a company through Penang, through Butterworth, that's been going on for forty years. I noticed it was mentioned the other day, somewhere, officially. So there was always likely contingencies. And anyway, we were professional and we were…We were still building for World War Three. There is no question of that, still I would say,

37:30 in the late '50s. In fact, there was no doubt in my mind, almost through to the '70s, that Australia had in mind that there was a major war coming. Always. And history will bear me out, deterrents worked. But you only know deterrents works, in retrospect.

That major war, that idea that it was coming, it was a nuclear war.

38:01 **How much were you, in the Australian Army, told about this side of things and what to do?**

We did nuclear warfare training, and chemical warfare training. We put on the gas masks…And we also considered, it wasn't terribly well done in detail, but they were exploding stuff at Woomera, which is coming out now. And Aboriginals and other people, even during World War 11, other people were guinea pigs for things at Woomera.

38:31 We had a chemical and nuclear…And we taught it as a subject. I think it was called NBC, Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare, yeah. So we were conscious of it. And the infantry will always be needed. It doesn't matter what technology you've got, you always have to have the infantry, to hold ground. That's been proven time and time again. And certainly 'air' solves nothing. Air power is a myth, except for destroying cities like

39:00 Berlin and London and Dresden. It doesn't do any good in operations in the field, particularly in jungles. You've got to have men on the ground, and they mostly have to have weapons that can be in close support with them.

We'll stop there and change the tapes.

Tape 4

00:46 **You mentioned that you didn't go on the Wallaby tour, you didn't go to Malaya, but you did get selected to be in the first SAS….How did that happen?**

01:02 I think that the fact that I didn't go to Malaya was almost a setback to my career, because it was active service pretty early on. But the SAS was thought to be a very good backup, but it was obviously going to be the coming thing. Everybody was excited about it. So there was handpicked people put into the SAS, and because I fell out of the group to Malaya….I only learnt about all this

01:30 in retrospect, by talking to people twenty, thirty years on, that I barely knew, who had manoeuvred my career, which is quite interesting. So the SAS was going to be the thing of the future, which it took a while to generate, but has become of course now, very strong.

What was the vision for the SAS when you first arrived there?

We wrote it. The vision was to be a 'special forces group'.

02:00 The West Australian aspect was straight political. It was much more sensible to have it on the eastern seaboard, but the West Australian premier, I don't know what sort of political persuasion, but they felt isolated. Once again, it might be difficult to understand now….or not so much since 11th of September hysteria, but it was very much laissez faire in West Australia, as it relatively is today, too, and they decided they wanted a company of the SAS, and it was

02:30 called 1st SAS Company. We actually wore a red beret. Didn't go to the sand coloured beret, the SAS, until it became a regiment. And so we wore what was the parachutist's beret, in Perth. And we strutted around Perth, and we marched through the city of Perth on Victory in the Pacific Day, one year. There is a marvellous photo of us. There was probably only a hundred people probably in it. But it was a marvellous time, and I led the first expedition north,

03:00 through the Kimberleys….I talked about that in the synopsis, didn't I? And the lengthy set-ups…

What were you doing in Perth on a day to day basis?

We were having a ball. We were reading a book by David Stirling, who had been the CO of the SAS in the desert, and it was called 'Long Range Desert Group' or something, marvellous book. World War 11 stuff, around about 'Alamein' time. We were training to drive trains. I had my 'Diggers' out on board

03:30 a tug, and they overpowered the tug crew. This was part of the scenario, but suddenly I saw there was another ship looming up, and suddenly all these guys had their mouths taped, the tug crew were all tied up. Had to get them free, because the ships were coming into port. It was a very big tug, it was like a ship. We were learning day to day, improvising, and the kids in my platoon were out of Malaya,

04:00 just back from' the Emergency', and they were 'gung-ho' and bloodthirsty. We went up to the Kimberleys to get them away from the bright lights. We were jumping and trying parachutes and gear. This was the first formative year of the SAS, but it was exciting, and we developed it into a great organisation.

What was the reputation of the SAS like in Perth? You mentioned

04:31 **that you had one of sorts?**

Everybody was excited with it, it was a brand new, glamorous concept. And the SAS was just sort of known. It was only started in World War 11 with David Stirling's group. And there was the British SAS in Malaya, that our troops had known. But basically the population was just happy to see fit young paratroopers occasionally appearing

05:00 in the suburbs of Perth. But we were busy, and we were running around the countryside. I think I did fifty thousand miles, inside Australia, in nine months, just with the SAS. Because we weren't allowed to parachute into Perth. We had to come over to Williamtown. Four days in a plane to jump for thirty seconds, twice. And then go back to Perth. When they did allow parachuting in Perth, a couple of young 'colts' were killed, so it was a safety point. But it was a nonsense, they just

05:30 had a bad accident with the reserve parachutes. It was just a bureaucratic thing. This is what the military has, all these sort of restrictions at various stages. But it was marvellous training, marvellous enthusiasm, and the SAS has just gone from strength to strength. People have said to, "Do you regret not staying with SAS?" Well, there was no way you could actually build a career as an officer with the SAS. Some fellows managed to go back two or three times. But where soldiers

06:00 could get promoted and then stay as senior NCOs, and then almost give up a career, maybe as an RSM….Officers had to go and have a broad education, a broad experience. But Mike Jeffrey, the current governor general, managed to have two or three appointments there in command. But it was an accident of chronology if you were able to do that. And I,

06:30 in a way, it was better to command a battalion of the regiment, more experience. Because as a CO of SAS, for instance, you really are disparate groups. It's a great prestige appointment, but you never really commanded in operations, because they're all small group operations, generally.

SAS blokes I spoke to from later on in the time frame, speak of the severe nature of the

physical training, the extreme fitness of the SAS. What sort of things

07:00 **did you do to keep fit?**

Absolutely non-stop. I mean, we were all very young. I think I was twenty two or something. We just non-stop….I don't know if there was much gym work, we just did road work and surfing and swimming and beach work. It was a very fit time. Certainly plenty of PT. It was more like outdoor PT and circuit training. That was the vogue.

07:30 That's what sporting teams did in those days. It's still a term, circuit training. Programmed exercise. That was the main strength and physical co-ordination work that we did. And plenty of intellectual stuff, too….

What was your personal role and rank at that time?

I was a lieutenant, I was still only two years out from Duntroon. And I was the reconnaissance officer of it, too. There were only three platoons in the company.

08:00 So there was a captain and a lieutenant in each platoon, and we used to do different roles anyway, so we would often take half the platoon each. The commander was only a major and there was a second in command, who was a captain. So there was four captains, a major and about three or four lieutenants. We had a signals group. We had a support group, which had signals and communications. A marvellous time, an extraordinarily exciting time.

08:30 **You mentioned carving 'LZs' in the desert. What was your introduction to using the helicopter?**

Well, I'd had an introduction, very early. As soon as I graduated I was involved with, at Tianjara, in the range south of Sydney, I was involved with HMAS Albatross. There were two marvellous pilots there. They were I believe the first helicopter pilots of

09:00 the Navy. Fergurson and O'Farrell. Shamus O'Farrell, who subsequently became Prince Philip's personal helicopter pilot. I was going to warn Prince Philip that he had an Irish Republican pilot, but I didn't think it was necessary. I flew with these guys, they were mad, they were great. Very early on, this was January, 1956. They were some of the early helicopters in the Australian Forces, I think. I may be wrong,

09:30 but I don't recall too many operational helicopters. I subsequently brought the navy helicopter squadron into Vietnam, just as an accident almost of chronology. When I was liaison officer at headquarters 2 Field Force Victor, in Long Binh, the Navy had a squadron go to Vietnam. Very interesting. They had a very different role to the Australian air force. 'Iroquois' helicopters. They flew with the Americans in the [Mekong] 'Delta'. They were

10:00 part of 7th [United States] air force. That's a story in itself, too.

In 1956, this was still a fairly new…

Toy.

Taking yourself back to that time as much as you can, without hindsight, what did you think about this new thing? Did you have any concept about how it might revolutionise the deployment of men in battle?

Yes. Well, in fact, it hasn't. It hasn't for one simple reason, that helicopters take so much maintenance. They still take four

10:30 hours maintenance for one hour's flying. I believe. So the flat roof houses in Sydney with their own helicopters have never materialised. But no, it was a marvellous concept. They were not used for troop deployment. These were not Iroquois, I don't think. I think they were 'Wessex's' [Wessex Helicopter], probably. So they were designed for [aircraft] 'carriers'. Subsequently they did have an Iroquois squadron.

11:00 No, I was excited. I wanted to fly one, and I did a little bit of 'coasting', but I didn't do any landing. But mostly they were just used for liaison and observation. Nothing like the 'Chinook' [Twin-rotored, heavy transport helicopter] concept, but very useful.

11:30 (break)

After your time with the SAS, you were posted to become the adjutant of 2nd RAR. Is that right?

Yes.

Tell us a bit about that.

Yes, in fact, it was an interesting time in the army's history because we went through re-organisations

12:00 as the military does. We were, in fact, a 'pentropic' [five distinct units] battalion for a while, commanded

by a beautiful man, Colonel Keith Coleman, who is no longer alive. But it was a big European type organisation, commanded by a full colonel, twelve hundred, fourteen hundred men, had its own support elements and it was a pretty exciting time. But then, to go to Malaya,

12:30 we had to downsize again to a normal infantry battalion, commanded by a lieutenant colonel. So I went through three phases. I went through 'pentropic', because Colonel Joe Mann was the original…Adrian Smith Mann, DSO, MC [Military Cross]. A famous character. I first went with him, then I became part of the 'pentropic', then we went to…We were downsized again, to Colonel Alan Stretton's battalion… Well, I went away

13:00 early, up to join 1st RAR, which was in Penang, Kuala Kangsar, Grik area in Northern Malaya, then came back down and met the battalion when they arrived, in about September, 1961, I think. Yes.

You would have had a pretty good insight as adjutant as to the functioning of that battalion in a pentropic formation. What are your views of that organisation?

13:31 It was prehistoric. It was not suitable for jungle fighting, and the terrain out here. It was a European concept and I cannot believe that we embraced it so wholeheartedly. I don't know how long it lasted, because I went back, away to Malaya. But I think it might have lasted five years, maybe more. It was like a little battle group and the Americans had a sort of a task force.

14:00 We then went, at that time to….We changed titles from brigades to task force, anyway. And we still use that term 'task force', I think, or we might be back to brigades, probably. And that was designed for nuclear, too, so we're talking Cold War. Really hot stuff. The 'hot' Cold War. So, that is right. The early '60s was probably the apex of the Cold War.

14:30 It was certainly getting close to hysteria levels. And that must have been when we did a fair bit of nuclear training, biological warfare training. But I was a lowly captain. But in a sense, because you are adjutant, you tend to be at the nerve centre of thing. There was a full colonel, lieutenant colonel 2IC [Second in Command], I think. It was quite a heavy thing. The company commanders were still all majors. It was good experience, but it was not relevant to…I don't know where people

15:00 thought we were going to operate. They must have thought that we were going to operate in Europe.

What then happened to you? How did you end up in Malaya? What posting were you given?

Well, I went away as adjutant. But as a result of….I was actually then posted to what sounded like a glamorous posting. Liaison Officer Headquarter Seventeen Ghurkha Division in Seremban, Central Malaya.

15:30 Unfortunately the fellow was a bit young that was sent to be the instructor at the Jungle Warfare School, which was a fairly prized posting….Not that I wanted to leave the battalion, but because he was not accepted, we swapped roles, and he went to be the liaison officer. He subsequently served with me in Vietnam, and I went to this 'hotshot' tough, 'one man Aussie show' in Kota Tinggi, South Johor. As an instructor for the next two and a half years.

16:01 No, two years. From early '62. And that's when I started to get involved in Vietnam….Well, Indo-China generally. But also very much…And I started to learn the language. I had Ghurkha demonstration troops, and they spoke better Malay than they spoke Gurkhali, so I went to a warrant officer, and I did a night course in Malayan language, and that's what led me,

16:30 ultimately, to go to ANU and do an honour's degree, part-time. But it was originally just to cope with Malay drivers, whose English wasn't too good and the Ghurkha soldiers who spoke Malay.

Can you tell us a little bit more about what was in Kota Tinggi, and what this 'one man Aussie show' was all about?

When I say one man, one officer instructor. We had two very good sergeants. One of whom became RSM in the army, Wally Thompson.

17:01 And we had a New Zealand sergeant, at least one, and then there were probably two British sergeants, then there would have been a British…There was one British, one Australian officer on the staff of the 'jungle' wing. And then we had what we called 'STAP', this was the semi-secret….S-T-A-P. It stood for 'Training Aid Program'. Probably secret. And this was training

17:30 the Vietnamese. From Vietnam, came down every six weeks to be trained here by the British. This was obviously not terribly publicised, because Britain and Russia were co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. So it was a unique experience. The locals didn't like any involvement in Vietnam, coming through Singapore to Changi airport. It used to be denounced in the Singapore Strait Times every year.

18:00 Tunku Abdul Rahman was the prime minister of Malaya and he was fairly flexible, whatever he did was expedient. He obviously got money for this, or some sort of thing. It was a fascinating little 'United Nations' in South Johor. It had a great reputation during the 'Emergency'. The Americans were flooding in to try and come and learn the secrets of counter-insurgency. And we had quite a big affect on that small American force that was in Vietnam in those early days. We had these blokes….

18:30 A lot of them were Special Forces, we trained them. The Americans own jungle warfare school in Panama wasn't terribly good, I understand. And in fact, the commandant of that jungle warfare school in Panama actually came and attended as a student, and learned the ropes at Kota Tinggi. So it was a very interesting posting.

How had you become qualified to be in this role? Were you an expert in counter insurgency?

No, I was just a

19:00 smart young captain, I think, that people thought I could adapt to the multiple roles there. I was well trained. We were at Canungra. We did Canungra as a jungle training…We did six weeks there, before we graduated from Duntroon. I think we were the first or second class to do that. Canungra was just hitting its straps again, since World War 11. And Colonel Serong commanded it. And a legend called Colonel George Warfe was his deputy, and

19:30 they're both dead, I think. But they were legends from World War 11, and they were still legends again starting Canungra up. So that was one tick on my box. I had been on the Malayan border, and I had been involved….But yeah, no, I was of course no jungle expert, but I could read and I was well taught and I listened and I was a pretty good instructor, I think. A lot of it was very down to earth stuff. And it was the sort of stuff we did anyway in

20:00 our training right through. And I probably knocked the cadet training in a sense. But right through the simple fundamentals that we trained at and which we were very good at. There was a progression right through my career. And very solid basis, I mean.

What was your 'bible'? What you were learning, or taking instruction from?

There was a 'bible' in Malaya,

20:30 and it eludes me. It had a green cover and it was a journal of counter terrorist operations. And it was almost called the 'green book'….I have no idea. That is terrible, that is one of my first really bad lapses of memory. But it was a very good publication. The acronym was 'Anti-Terror Operations in Malaya'.

21:00 The 'ATOM' pamphlet. That's right, it was called the 'ATOM pamphlet'. It was written by the British Army. But one very interesting part of it, and I haven't mentioned it earlier, I was an original guinea pig on the Code of Conduct course, from the SAS in West Australia, over here in Sydney, in about June-July of 1958.

21:30 And I subsequently was on the staff of that bloodthirsty group that ran Code of Conduct courses in Malaya, where British psychiatrists from Harley Street came out, flew out especially to interrogate prisoners as a way of preventing Chinese type interrogation, or off-setting it. And so I had an experience, initially as a young SAS fellow, who actually just wanted a week in Sydney. I had no idea that the course was that,

22:00 because they didn't tell us. And then I subsequently was on the other end, where we chased fellows through the jungle, got them tired, we used dogs, got them tired for three days, then brought them in, and these head-hunters from Harley Street used interrogation techniques that could break anybody without any physical thing within about four hours. Very, very important experience in life. Certainly in the commercial jungle

22:30 it has been very useful to me in countering interrogation, and also understanding interrogation techniques.

That was part of the training at Kota Tinggi as well?

Yes, it happened to be a very similar course. The one in Sydney was scraped after a few years, because the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] exposed it. It was thought that these young fellows would be damaged psychologically by undergoing this sort of interrogation. I believe that's not right

23:00 because they were strong, robust characters, but I can understand the rationale, but I think it's being a bit too 'kid-glovish'. I mean, people may say that I have been affected, but I'm not aware of it.

Can you give us a rough idea of what you mean by these techniques that would make anybody crack?

I tell you what, they were very interesting. I will go back first to the Australian, I can generalise, because they were similar. In the Australian one, we didn't have Harley Street psychiatrists, who looked a bit mad to me, to start with,

23:30 but they were good. But it involved lights like this….And the techniques of the interrogator are fairly well known, but what the counter-techniques are, the very good ones, which are about clinging to very familiar things, only giving your number, rank and name….Remember this is post-Korea hypnosis, plus China worry, fear of China invading. So that was the rationale for it. And of course, so many defections,

24:00 particularly amongst Americans in Korea. Not too many Australians defected, but there were some. No Turks defected, very interesting. The power of the religion and practical hard men. But all this experience was distilled into Australian….The techniques were very similar. They kept us awake at

night, loud noises and screaming, caterwauling, Asians screaming. There were a

24:30 lot of Asians in the Australian Army we didn't know, because we didn't see a white face in this whole thing. So it was a very racist inspired….But it was real to the planners at that stage. So we were kept awake. And I actually escaped at one stage, because I had to get a telegram to my then girlfriend in Perth. And I was picked up by the Military Police and lost them, trying to convince a migrant lady who didn't speak much English to pay for a telegram, to get to my girlfriend in Perth. When I was arrested by the Military Police and

25:00 returned to my cell. It was very real to us. I mean, we knew that we weren't being bashed and belted. But sleep deprivation and constant interrogation is…Civil libertarians would balk at this, or scream at it, but in fact it was right for the times, because we were facing this enemy who was very good at this. And you

25:30 learnt to delay things, and you learnt to not stand out in the crowd, you learnt to be like the original dumb Joe. Give your number, rank and name and nothing else. But even that, after three hours of silence, is a lovely thing, to be able to do. To just mellow the, "Two three five zero eight two, lieutenant…." I used to say, "Ian Barry," just to get those lovely words out. Because silence is a very good technique against interrogation, I learnt. But not too many people are good at that.

26:00 They tend to be either drawn or be provoked, and that is the sort of reaction that interrogators are wanting. And you also learnt that they haven't got too many good interrogators there. They're sort of like the end of the line. They've only got one or two hotshots, the rest are like guards come security types. You can outwit them if you keep your cool.

Back to Kota Tinggi, that was part of the training there, what else was on the curriculum?

26:35 Canungra…They were soul-mates, almost, as establishments. But the basic course was a six week course for captains to sergeants; just basic jungle…Survival was in it, too. We taught jungle survival. We taught living off the land, which was interesting. And how to make coffee out of burnt rice, and

27:01 just surviving. We had a very interesting incident where an elephant trampled our survival food store down one night. It was pretty real stuff. I had a confrontation with a tiger in Malaya, with a little group of Ghurkhas. They weren't too fussed about it; they felt it was an old tiger. But I wasn't too interested in the state of its teeth. And none of us had a weapon with us….We had machetes, but not….

27:32 So very realistic, and the Ghurkhas provided a very good enemy, demonstration force. Not too much theory. Revolutionary warfare, I taught that. It was sort of a forte of mine. Linking the 'Maos' [rural-oriented communists], and Che Guevara…I had done that sort of study at Duntroon, embryonically, and then perfected it a bit. I didn't necessarily develop the syllabus. Also, I had the advantage

28:00 of having been in Vietnam every few months, 'under my slouch hat', for this British Army organisation, finding out what the Americans were doing. I was a little one man information system, come whatever….

While we're still on Kota Tinggi, what were the different nationalities that you came across there?

I did mention this in the synopsis, but Indonesian, Nepalese, Ghurkha, Filipino, Cambodian,

28:30 Laotian, British, Australian, New Zealand, Americans by the droves. Vietnamese, of course, in the special STAP courses. I'm pretty sure we had people from Africa…We just about had the United Nations. It was fascinating. Not army, navy, air force, but marines. Whereas the Joint Services Staff College in Canberra was joint services,

29:00 this was strictly, mostly infantry types. The marines are, of course, American infantry. US Marines. And we had, of course, the 42nd Commando Marines, they were on the hill opposite us. They were an artillery unit. But that whole area of Kota Tinggi had a very interesting composition of forces, that were not attached to the Jungle Warfare School but were co-located. And so we had resources like that.

29:31 An interesting footnote. 42nd Commando, brackets, 'Maiwand' was the name of a battery….I never wondered about it until I was walking the Dasht i Dara 'Desert of Death' in Afghanistan one day, and I saw a sign post to a little village called 'Maiwand'. There were four British VCs won there in the first Afghan War. It was a defeat, of course. A disaster. The British only celebrate defeats. And 'Maiwand' was this little defile, where the Commonwealth British soldiers went into,

30:00 and the Afghans shot down it and killed them all. It was perpetuated a hundred and fifty years later in the commando regiments battle honours. 'Maiwand'. And I just happened to cross reference it all.

What did you learn about these different nationalities and how they operated in their military operation work?

I learned a hell of a lot, actually. It stood me in good stead. I really have become an Asian expert in my civil life, an Asian consultant in my civil life.

30:32 But I was always interested in Asia, obviously. You would think any normal Australian would be, but we had a series of governments that weren't. And the curriculums weren't, too. Yes, I learned individual

characteristics and general characteristics that were very useful to me, forever. I don't think I delineated them

31:00 except, perhaps, the happy go lucky Filipinos, maybe. And the Indonesians …Well, you use a label like 'Indonesian'. It doesn't mean anything, because it's so tribal. We also had Sarawak Rangers, too, on the staff. They were the trackers. I was there when Malaysia was actually formed. Malaysia was formed around about the end of November, 1963. And of course, it was a momentous political

31:30 move to stop the Chinese population dominating Malaysia. They brought Sarawak and Borneo and Brunei into the Malaysian foundation. The timeline is interesting. Kennedy was assassinated in November, '63. Malaysia was very close to that date. I didn't know Kennedy had been assassinated for about five days. I must have been the last person to….I was pretty deep in the jungle. But Malaysia when Lee Kwan Yew cried on television….Sorry, he was kicked out of Malaysia in January, 64.

32:01 But all these political interplays were going on, and I'm sitting on the South Malaysian border near Singapore, and actually involved with people at the political study centre in Singapore. One of whom had been a leading communist in the insurgency. He was number three in the Communist Party. Lee Kwan Yew was clever enough to use these people. They were a marvellous source. There was a 'Brit' called George Thompson. They were a marvellous source of intelligence and/or operational data for us at the

32:30 Jungle Warfare School. For me, particularly, and I'm certain they picked my brains on my little expeditions to Vietnam during this period, too. So I wasn't part of an intelligence network as such, but I sure as hell was involved in it, in many ways.

Just back to the different types of people that you were teaching. There's a temptation to generalise, I know, but is there any comparison you can make between say, the American and Australian troops, and….

And the Asian troops?

33:04 Oh, yes, first of all with the Americans, they were 'babes in the woods' in the sense of individual skills. They would almost be…not the worst. But the worst in the fundamentals of jungle craft. But then they were good learners, too. Australians were pretty damn good. The Ghurkhas were excellent. I've always tried to think about comparing Ghurkhas and Australians. In my

33:30 opinion, in jungle, I would almost prefer a Ghurkha battalion or company. Because you know what they're going to do. They do what you tell them to do, until they stop. The Aussies 'independence' is a bit of a handicap at times, because they make their own mind up and go and do it, maybe. But that's being a bit of an autocratic leader. The Australians are much better in desert, where you need that initiative and flexibility. So I would always take an Australian battalion overall,

34:00 but the Ghurkhas were beautiful, magnificent young men and superb soldiers. The Nepalese, on the contrary, they were sort of the lowlanders in Nepal. The Ghurkhas come from above, about eighteen thousand feet. The lowlanders were from about seventeen thousand feet down, were sort of clumsy by comparison. It's sort of a ridiculous comment to make, when you're talking about differences in altitude. It's altitude and attitude and possibly some racial differences. Although the Ghurkhas were just a tribe of them. But the Nepalese were fairly

34:30 inept. The Laotians were fairly inept. The Cambodians were quite good in some ways. The Malays weren't as good as the Singaporeans. Of course, I haven't mentioned the Singaporeans. Very fine little army, they were very good. But then the Chinese are good at everything. The Malays were a bit less efficient. The Indonesians are much tougher and stronger.

35:00 They both evolved and have almost the same language, but Indonesians have had to fight for independence. The Malays got it without having to fight for it. So you can just see the differences in the language and the mentality of approach. Filipinos, they were happy and friendly, and some of them were very good. I think I missed a few nationalities, but that will do.

How did you get on in respect to language?

I think they had to have at least workable

35:30 English, but it didn't always happen. But so, no, it was a British Army Jungle Warfare School, so the guys weren't allowed to come unless they had some basic English. So basically it was a very happy, very good instruction. A lot of it is pretty fundamental stuff, and almost sign language. We're talking about simple

36:00 soldiering in jungle, a lot of it, and simple tactics. It's called a platoon commanders course. We had colonels on it, because they realised it was valuable. A little classic story. On the night of December, 1962, firing broke out in Brunei town, and we had the Indonesians on the course. Fighting broke out about nine o'clock on Friday night, which was party night in Singapore, usually.

36:31 And that was the start of the Brunei revolt, which become a confrontation, with the Indonesians. The confrontation against Malaysia, theoretically, and Britain, and we knew what the Indonesians were going to do, because we trained them. But on the Monday morning, an American came into the course

and we said, “Oh, a number of officers and Brits have left, they’ve gone to war in Brunei.”

37:00 They said, “Some of our Ghurkha troops left at six a.m.” And the Americans looked at me, one of the Americans said, “You Brits…” I’m wearing a slouch hat, he said, “You Brits. That’s phenomenal.” He said, “Shooting started at nine o’clock at night. And troops?” I said, “Yes, the troops were on the airfield ready to go.” I said, “In fact, they had to wait two hours for the aeroplanes to come.” A couple of them said, “We belong to the Major Strategic Command of the United States, on operational

37:30 readiness for nuclear war. Twenty four hours a day. Seven days a week.” He says, “We can’t move within seven days. We’ve got to sell our cars to start with; we’ve got to do this, that and the other.” And everybody just broke up. And I worried for the Free World, temporarily, for a few minutes. I thought, “This standby force that is supposed to be circling the globe, above Alaska, on stand-by? We couldn’t move for seven days. We’ve got to sell our cars first.” Terrible story.

You mentioned that it was fundamental

38:00 **jungle warfare that you were teaching. It must be a difficult job, I know, but could you distil the basic principles of fundamental jungle warfare? It might have been those that were in that ATOM pamphlet for example?**

That shouldn’t be a hard one, but it is. I mean, fire and movement, simple principles. Colonel Serong was asked something in this Vietnam enclave of generals, and he said

38:30 something that was almost line one, section one, of this pamphlet. In the Infantry Section Leaders pamphlet, “You should have one foot on the ground before you move, and then move the fire there.” And there was almost an audible intake of breath from the Americans. I thought they were going to ‘clap’ at this statement from Colonel Serong, which was what every section commander learns on day one, almost. But you know, fundamentals. That’s what we’re good at. That’s what our sporting teams are good at, too.

39:00 So it is fire and movement, it is communication skills, it’s visual signals, don’t go screaming out. It’s really down to…there’s no black magic about it, it’s down to earth repeating of fundamental soldiering, but it’s emphasised in jungle because of the closeness of the ground. I mean, we killed our own blokes in Vietnam because they suddenly

39:30 didn’t realise that the section had gone past. They had been just, not dozing, maybe just not even concentrating, for two minutes, thirty seconds, rushing up behind a soldier; he turns and drops them dead. He normally couldn’t hit someone at a hundred paces, he goes and drops this bloke and puts five rounds through his heart because he is one of ours. So, it is simple drills and it is repetitive and perhaps that’s why I’m saying it’s almost boring, because it is so fundamental.

40:00 There is no black art. You don’t go swinging from the trees on ropes and things, you just do the things simply and correctly, and because observation by day or by night…by night it’s murder, you have to stick to the rules and know what other people are doing and trust them. You then have techniques like setting ambushes with Claymore mines and some more sophisticated techniques. And

40:30 luring people into them. But really, it’s not rocket science. It’s not a very adequate explanation, I’m sorry.

We have to stop there.

Tape 5

00:27 **Just to clear my own mind on this, during this time, you were going to and from Vietnam on these sort of pseudo espionage…**

No, no, no. It was information gathering. The reason that is was ‘clandestine’ was that I was working for the British Army, and they weren’t supposed to be there.

Kota Tinggi and Johor. Can you just explain the…

The geography? Kota Tinggi, which I think in Malay means ‘tall village’ or ‘tall timber’, no, it’s ‘tall village’, or ‘high village’,

01:00 and it would be all of a hundred or two hundred feet high, above the ground. Above sea level. It was a small village which was used for the colloquial name for the Jungle Warfare School. “Oh, he was at Kota Tinggi?” So it was known by the Malay name, by the armies and…So that means something to soldiers of the era. That’s about thirty kilometres east of Johor-Bahru, the capital of Johor, and we lived actually

01:30 in Johor-Bahru and commuted out. Although we spent most of our time in the jungle, and we also lived in the barracks, but our families lived in Johor-Bahru. It’s just across the causeway from Singapore, and in those days, particularly ‘pre-Malaysia’ there was no customs….Yes there was, there was customs, but things tightened up a lot once Malaysia started.

The basis of all this was based on a British set-up?

Oh yes, I gave a fairly inadequate

02:01 answer about what was special about our training in jungle warfare. We Australians were regarded as experts, at the end of World War 11, because 'Canungra' had a mythology and many Americans went through that.…Not a mythology, because it was true. Quite a few people died in training at Canungra. It was no kindergarten school. times I'm talking about, and a lot of them had come and spent a few weeks at least at the jungle warfare school.

02:30 Fifteen, twenty years later when Canungra was opened by the same people, there were far more restrictions on where you could fire live rounds and things. Let's say that Occupational Health & Safety standards improved. As tends to happen in relatively peace-time conditions. But our expertise really stemmed from that and we have to give credit where credit is due, we the 'big Aussie jungle fighters', in fact, learned a hell of a lot from the Brits. We sat at the Brits feet in the Malayan campaign. They were there,

03:00 they wrote the text books, post-Malaya, and during it. They learned the hard way, too. They were a colonial power, but they were very good at it and there was a General Templar, who was very well known. And there was a British civil servant, whose name could have been George Thompson, but I've used that, who was used to advise the Americans in Vietnam on civic action and on the program of the villages. So we owe a great debt to the

03:30 British. It was a British jungle warfare school, and they taught the techniques. Much of which Australians did instinctively in their training, but they taught the niceties of pacification and village searches. They were really quite experts at it. Those ex-pat Brits that were in Malaya for quite a while. Not the Brits from the suburbs of London, in the regiments, who came out pink cheeked and white-kneed. But they soon learnt it through this excellent jungle school. It was run on a

04:00 shoestring. It was a tiny little establishment in thatched huts. But it had this reputation around the world as such that the Americans rushed to it, and the commander of the forces in Vietnam came and visited while we were there. It had this reputation. And of course, I've talked of the elite force in Vietnam, that was about five thousand, maximum eight thousand, in the

How had jungle warfare training developed from World War 11?

04:32 The techniques probably hadn't, it was just that some of the weapons had. The new weapons such as the Claymore, which was a mine-shaped charge/explosive, which were very useful for ambushes. There were these rocket propelled grenades, and there was also a weapon.…that I called the M72, yes, it was a grenade launcher attached to the end of a rifle,

05:00 and it was an excellent weapon for jungle, because you could direct it…You can only really fire in close jungle, maybe thirty or forty metres, and this thing went about a hundred metres if you wanted it to. But you needed these close support weapons, and that was an excellent one. The 'Carbine', the semi-automatic weapons had improved. The old 'Owen' gun of Australian design was marvellous but it was

05:30 supplanted by, first of all, an automatic rifle, the 'seven point six two', yes, and then there was the American 'Armalite'[AR-15]. I carried an Armalite in Vietnam because it was light and it was automatic, but boy, because it was automatic it needed careful maintenance, and it was possible to jam. And we got into lots

06:00 of dry areas. People think of the tropics as wet all the time. In Vietnam, there was a drought. We were digging in for anything, streams, and they didn't have any water. We'd dig ten feet down and not get water. So these techniques were more about weapons than tactics. But of course, reacting to enemy weapons, too. But not a great difference. There wouldn't have been much difference between the fighting on the Owen Stanleys, in World War 11, and the Malayan

06:30 campaign.…Depending on the sophistication of your enemy. And of course the Malayan enemy was very much the bandit type guerrilla warfare in Malaya. So the Brits were dealing with very relatively benign, if I can use that word, situations. They had massive firepower themselves, but they were dealing with a guerrilla force. So they, of course, got the techniques right.

07:00 They weren't necessarily directly adaptable to Vietnam, when you had North Vietnamese forces coming down in formations. But the sensible people adapted to that. They changed…

Just share with me the thinking behind training so many groups of people, from so many different countries. Why so many?

Interesting question. They were sort of ones and twos, in

07:30 a course of about forty people. So these courses were made available to them, and people were given a quota. I think it was part of like a military aid program. I haven't actually analysed this myself. I think it was about actually spreading the word and the gospel of techniques to Allied countries. Now some, as I say, started shooting at us. But I think it was, and this was a British endeavour, remember. We had different nationalities at Canungra, of course, too.

08:03 And it's part of the military…The military was strongly trying to bring people into the fold. You hoped they were going to stay friends forever. The Koreans, too, I missed them. They were very good soldiers. So to me it wasn't a point to query and it wasn't any specific plan, it was generally aiding forces and teaching them things that we wanted them to know

08:30 for their own good, and for our good. And goodwill of course, too, enormous goodwill. People were wedded to this. I saw this at Joint Services Staff College, particularly at senior levels in Canberra later on…And at Duntroon, it applied. We had students. The Crown Prince of Thailand was a graduate of Duntroon. He wasn't a very good soldier, and he got through because he was the crown prince. He's not a very good crown prince, either. And the

09:00 Pacific nations. I've probably left out Fijians and some of the Pacific nations, too, at the Jungle Warfare School, and generally the military has done this very well. Better than the politicians have. But of course, they needed political agreement to have it happen, so obviously….It's a very sensible aspect. But a lot of people don't know. In this case, we're talking Britain. But the same thing applied in Australia, as much as possible. Bring these people in to get them to think with us. Not to brainwash them, but to

09:30 work and have confidence in us.

Just out of interest, were there any accidents at that time, with weaponry?

Of course, yes. But nobody to my knowledge was killed in the Jungle Warfare School in the two and a half years I was there. There had been some near misses. But not so much with ammunition, more people falling over cliffs at night. As you do in the jungle.

10:01 As I say, I had one tiger confrontation, and I heard a lion another time, or a tiger. And there was the odd elephant. There were snakes, cobras, and that's a nasty experience. The medical officer who briefed us before we went away, with the 2nd Battalion, said, "There's ninety nine species of snake in Malaya, only two of them are venomous."

10:30 And somebody said, "You don't stop to ask the snake 'Are you venomous?'" But apparently that was a true statistic, and the cobra was one of them, obviously.

Was there an occasion that you came face to face with a cobra?

I have seen one, yes, and it wasn't nice. But one of the better stories, promoting the myth of 'The Great Aussie'. I was standing talking to a group of soldiers one day, at a course early on, and

11:00 there was an American officer in the group. I remember that because I told him to put mosquito repellent, "Particularly on your boots. That's the most important part, to keep the leeches out." I said, "And also around your crotch." And I said, "What's your name?" And he said, "Lieutenant Dick." He said, "And I'm going to protect the most valuable part of me. I'm a Marine, and I'm putting it all

11:30 over here." And at that same gathering, I was talking them in earnest about ambush actions, and I felt something on my foot, and I was writing, and I was using a Parker pen of all things in the jungle, a fountain pen, in a notebook, ticking some points off to them. And when I looked down at this tapping, I saw that I had a very big snake wrapped around my jungle boot.

12:00 And it was pecking away at the rubber on my jungle boot. It had a diamond on it, and there was venom all over the thing. And I managed to just go, what I thought was berserk. I kicked the bloody snake away, and within seconds the Ghurkhas had got hold of it and chopped it up, because it would go well with a nice meal. And then I made all these people…I said, "Look, I had a very valuable pen. Now I want you fellows to break off and search around."

12:31 I said, "I flung it away." And the cool Aussie image came through about three minutes later, when they had all searched around, they said, "Sir? What is that in your pocket?" And I looked down and I had, according to them, calmly put the pen in my pocket and then dispensed with the snake, which the Ghurkhas chopped up as though it was a pre-arranged action. And we had no trouble from that group later on. And here was me reckoned I had panicked totally and flung the pen. It was in my top pocket. So we preserved the myth-legend of the Aussies.

13:01 That was about accidents, wasn't it? Did I have a confrontation? Yes. And I did actually. The tiger stories almost were. I had some senior officers out, and this was interesting, they were senior officers, the confrontation was well underway, so the brigadiers and all the 'shiny bums' [deskbound generals] from Singapore decided they needed to know something about jungle warfare, so they all came out. They had all been in World War 11 or something. They all knew a fair bit about it, but they were pretty useless. So we 'birded', we made them walk a bit, then we bashed them up for the night in a fairly tight perimeter. They didn't sort of let

13:34 any space in between each bed that they made…Very tight. And I said, "Look, I'm sick of this." So we went for a walk with this sergeant, a really deadbeat sergeant, and we took a couple of Ghurkhas along with us, not a rifle between us. We went for a walk, just to clear the air, it was sunset, and suddenly Sergeant Smith, Sergeant Harold Smith, a brilliant man, had a plate in his head from where a soldier had swung a golf club when he walked around a corner, and he managed to be

14:00 convinced after a week in hospital, that it wasn't intentional….Harold Smith said, "T…t…t…t…Tiger!" And there were two Ghurkhas ahead, and there was Sergeant Smith and myself, and we stopped. And there was this old man tiger standing right opposite us on the track. The light was fading, but it was there, and I could sort of tell that it was old. It was 'jowly' a bit.

14:30 But I didn't do too much, except to try and sharpen my machete behind my back without antagonising the tiger. The Ghurkhas were standing there looking pretty unconcerned. Then Sergeant Smith made one of those brave gestures, he felt he had to do something because he knew I would be frozen with fear. And he went, "Ah ha!" at the tiger, and nothing happened. So he got bolder and went, "Ah ha!" And with that, the tiger's tail twitched, I can see it now,

15:02 it twitched more, it sort of tossed its head and then it went and padded off in the other direction. And there was a main road to Mersing, only about a hundred and fifty yards away…So there is two aspects to the story, I'll keep it simple. I said, "How did we just stumble on the tiger?" And the Ghurkhas said, "No, no, we saw the pad marks earlier on, 'Sarg' [sergeant]. We just didn't think it was too much of a worry." And with that I said, "Thanks fellows, very much."

15:30 So we went out cautiously and followed the tiger, and we saw it go across the road and lie down on the other side of the road. And down the road, coming the other way, was a cyclist, an Indian rubber tapper, cycling along. So we screamed out to him, "Rimau! Rimau! Rimau!" Which is 'tiger' in Malay. And he waved back because he saw the slouch hat and he said, "Yeah. 'Tiger beer.' 'Tiger beer.'" So he rode off towards the tiger. We didn't stay around to find out whether the tiger

16:00 got a meal or not. But it's a true story. Two stupid examples in one. The sergeant trying to frighten the tiger and then us trying to warn the bloke, "Tiger!" And he thought we were saying Tiger Beer.

Vietnam. You were now occasionally going across to Vietnam?

It was about every six or nine months. I found a reason to do it.

16:31 There were genuine exchange visits. But I was able to, by virtue of my involvement with the STAP program; check in through the Australian Embassy, gently. But the Brits knew I was there. We were training the Vietnamese. And the Brits couldn't go there, because of the Geneva Agreement, you know, within reason. And also because of Colonel Serong, once the Training Team went there.

17:00 We actually put the Training Team, just gently through Kota Tinggi. We didn't presume to train them. They were already trained. The first Training Team came through us and then went on. And that is how Serong knew I was there, and that I had been there a bit earlier. And then when I went up, Colonel Serong sort of mentored me a bit, and we had a couple of fairly hairy incidents. But I was there…Not to spy on Americans or anything, no, it was to get information

17:30 because it was hard to get it back, because we were training people who were going there, so we were just trying to be up to date as possible. It was just a marvellous coincidence of aims and that I, as an Australian, could do it from the staff. And I wanted to do it. It was very interesting experience.

Can you talk me through just the gathering of information and what you brought back?

I've got a stack of stuff. First of all because I went to…First of all in Saigon I went

18:00 to commanders meetings. General Harkins was the commander, and I went because of Serong. I went so that I understood the strategic aims and then I understood the tactical aims, because Serong would put me in it. But I also then went out in the field. I have some photographs of a raid we did across country, pretty close to the Cambodian border, with a colonel, who was a divisional commander but

18:30 he took four companies of rangers. We flew and then we ran. And here was me thinking, "Australians are fit." There is a photograph of me looking very bedraggled at one stage. I was a twenty eight year old captain. We ran across country and we hit a camp. No firepower, no air, no nothing. We just did it in simple fashion.

19:00 They got away, most of them, but we got streams of information. That was a marvellous, stealthy operation. Almost impossible to succeed when you've got four companies. We had about three hundred men, probably. All Vietnamese, a few American advisors and me, and this Vietnamese lieutenant colonel.
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This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

19:58 But you had asked me what type of operations? All I needed to do

20:00 was come in about this operation and just talk about Diem.

We'll start from there. What type of operation?

Well, we ran across cross country in this operation, which impressed me tremendously. We moved by helicopter and jeep, I think, across one a half provinces. We were coming from Song Be area, not too far from the Cambodian border.

20:30 We crossed another province, and then they ran. And I mean ran. I was used to, with Ghurkhas, having two meals a day. Ghurkhas would normally get up and march for four or five hours, then eat, and then eat again at about four o'clock, either after the day's rain had come…But you were always eating before dark, so that you could clean up, or maybe even move on if you had to, for security reasons. The Vietnamese were a bit more ramshackle. They used to make a lot of noise at night. But they would

21:00 get up and run in the morning, too, so they weren't hit straight away by the North Vietnamese. Then eat about ten, then eat again about four, for a similar reason. But they ran because everyone would know where they were, whereas the Ghurkhas were so silent and efficient, but they still did this discipline. So it was non-stop running, and I mean running through the jungle. Sometimes on paths, sometimes not. And we attacked this camp, and we only got fleeting bloody parts of them. But it was a tremendous operation and

21:30 I was so impressed with a) the divisional commander, as a lieutenant colonel…He was an associate of President Diem's, and when the Americans moved against Diem, at some stage, which is fairly widely acknowledged…not necessarily a fact, but they got rid of Diem. I believe Colonel Dien was subsequently got rid of, which is a shame because he was a great soldier. I had a great regard for these people. You learned more in that forty eight hours than you would learn with almost a lifetime of text books

22:00 in the sense of techniques and tactics, and what to do and what not to do. So that was the sort of thing. I happened to be back in Saigon, on my way back to Malaya, and I was in the toilet of the Australian Embassy, and the ambassador who was slightly known to me.…He married a young lady that you might know, and we were standing there, doing 'our business', and he said to me, "You wouldn't have been anywhere near the Cambodian border in the last forty eight hours, would you?"

22:30 I said, "Well, as a matter of fact I was." He said, "Oh God." He said, "We've had a message from the Cambodian President, who protested." Somehow or other there were 'eyes' in the jungle that you knew the Forces.…You weren't allowed to cross the border. I mean, I wasn't running the operation, but the border was known. But the Cambodian Prime Minister, Sihanouk, [Norodom Sihanouk, formerly King.]

23:04 had actually put in a protest note about it. It showed there were 'eyes in the jungle' everywhere. They particularly wanted to make a point. They didn't want any American incursions…Well, there were American advisors in Cambodia. In fact, Australia represented America in Cambodia in that period, for quite a while. America had no diplomatic relations with Cambodia because they got so angry with them, and Australia was carrying the American flag in Cambodia.

23:30 **Just in respect to that particular operation, your role was as an observer? Advisor?**

Yeah, I was definitely…I ended up having an operational role after about twenty four hours with some of the younger Vietnamese blokes. But they were very competent. So there was nothing I could teach them. I was another weapon on the ground, if you like, but because Diem had agreed to take me, it was a very big compliment to me to go on an operation like that.

24:00 They were scrambled. Just as we were scrambled in subsequent operations. But I was very fortunate to be able to go. And this was early days. This was 1962, probably. Not too many Americans in the country.

And from what I understand, when you tell the story, Dien attacked with too many men? Three companies was too many?

No, no, no. They didn't know what sort of force they were up against. The intelligence was rarely accurate. They took…

24:31 I think four companies is probably too much. I think it was possibly two companies of rangers. Rangers are a bit like our Special Forces, they operated in smaller groups, but they weren't as good as that, so they tended more to operate in tens, twenties and thirties. There would have been perhaps, on reflection, probably only a hundred and fifty, maximum two hundred. But boy, out in the middle of there, if you were going to hit a North Vietnamese, for instance, you'd want…The rangers were better than normal soldiers.

25:00 They were excellent. They were very fast and moved well and quietly. But the enemy was very good, too.

So I take it that part of your observing, this was to work out what the enemy was doing as well as to observe?

Yes, almost that, both…But very much, 'to know thine enemy', is the gospel and that was what it was. It was everything. Picking up 'atmosphere'. I mean, nobody knew too much at this stage, what was going on. This was very early

25:30 days for us. And also, an old French colony, not the knowledge like with British…administrations, and bureaucracy, and of course the French are not very good at this infrastructure, so.…They were loved by

the people, but very inefficient. Compared to the Brits, who weren't necessarily loved by the people, but respected. The administration was appalling, and that's one of the problems of fighting in Indo-China was….

26:01 the chaotic colonial administration.

So what were some of the big lessons that you brought back from Vietnam?

From those sort of excursions? The level of sophistication of the enemy. Certainly first hand information about their bunkers and layouts and

26:31 what sort of goods and chattel they carried, because they ran like hell and left everything behind. Enormous. There was a Viet Cong bra, for instance, so there were women in the camps, of course. Women they used extensively. They really had equality of the sexes in the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong set-up. And maps and diagrams and lots of documents and other things that were quite useful.

27:00 I managed to snaffle some of them first hand, because there was so much documentation lying around. So all of it is useful for intelligence purposes. And for training school to show the sorts of things…And photographs, too, of course. I took a lot of photographs of installations. One of the things that I was able to tell people, and give them confidence, was how good the Vietnamese Rangers were, too. That in itself was very important information,

27:30 because we Aussies, particularly, tend to be a bit disdainful of other people. We tend to think we're pretty good, on sporting fields and in military, and we need to know when other people are doing things right, and we can learn a lesson. So very much a learning and listening…

In those early days, did some of those lessons you were learning from Vietnam affect the training they were doing in…

In Kota Tinggi? Yes, I believe so. I had charts and

28:00 maps that I developed of the types of operations and attacks. I handed them onto people afterwards. There is nothing like firsthand information and eyewitness accounts….And the inability of soldiers to hit a moving target, particularly, which is common to all Armies in jungle, when you're a bit scared and breathing heavily. So all of it, first hand stuff,

28:30 in that environment. Similar to, but different to Malayan anti-terrorist conditions. And that's the important thing, to learn the differences. Teach a doctrine from the last effort, but modify it to suit the current incumbent.

What was your thinking at the time when you went to Vietnam, on these occasions, about how the war would develop and escalate? Did you see that was going to be the case?

29:01 I'd like to think that I was pretty strategic about it. It was pretty exciting stuff, pretty heady stuff that I was getting into. I thought the Americans were good, because they were hand-picked, they were the Special Forces, they were the 'Green Berets'. And so they were….They were listening. They were listening to the British doctrine, and they were hungry like we were in the SAS days for information, when we first formed SAS.

29:31 I didn't have any feeling of American arrogance. I was impressed with that. I was impressed with these guys. One of them I had particular contact with, led me into a minefield that I didn't want to particularly be in. Briefed Congress, I read a few months later in 'Time' [magazine], where he stood up in front of the joint Congress and briefed them. And I thought, 'That's good, they're trying to learn from people who actually know what they're doing.' And he was a captain who won the Medal of Honour, or something.

30:00 I met some very good guys, who were very useful to the rest of my career, in the Americans. So I've made a couple of anti-American statements, but I have a great respect for many things that the Americans do. It's just the 'big gorilla' approach is not necessarily the best in these sorts of situations. But at small level things, they were very good. And they were training, they were doing like a training team role with the Vietnamese, and they were being reasonably successful.

30:30 Now the Rangers were the best of them, but the normal American troops were not good. And therefore, the answer to your question is, there were obviously big problems on the way, because the enemy were motivated. You knew that. You knew that as a text book thing, that they would be highly motivated. But they proved it and they were brave, and as I subsequently learnt, they fought bloody well when they were pinned, in different circumstances with Australian troops later on.

31:00 **Just in respect to the North Vietnamese and also the South, during these early days how did you rate them as actual troops?**

I know I'm wise after the event later. I know the North Vietnamese were much better. The North Vietnamese and I knew that from my study, they were coal miners, they were industrial workers, and the people who came from the south were those who couldn't cope under the north regime after World War 11.

31:31 There were lots of people who, for reasons of religion, the Catholic religion, came south. But there was a definite sort of softness about people in the South, and you didn't find too much softness about people from the North. They'd walked a long way to start with, and secondly they seemed to be highly motivated. And there's no doubt, the South Vietnamese troops, many of them were inferior and badly trained at all stages of the conflict.

32:00 And that's a reflection on national characteristics and corrupt governments and not enough individual training able to be applied by American and Australian advisors.

You've shared with us one operation that you were involved in, in Vietnam, can you also share with us a couple of others that also you went on? Or what else you did?

Yes, I got involved in…Some of these things were

32:30 sort of ancillary, some of them span a time frame, but that doesn't matter so much. I had occasion to go to Song Be, which was a sort of headquarters area, in a chopper, and then I was going to an outpost on the border, Bu Dop, which was a ranger area later on, but still similar to where I had been on the first one, and there was the usual contingent of

33:02 Vietnamese soldiers with a chicken in their helmet or something, and taking some food for people. They were coming from a town back out to an outpost. There were sick wives on board the chopper, it was pretty loaded. I had an American colonel with me, too, and we were on a bit of a fact-finding thing. So we set out with a pilot, who seemed a bit nervous to me…That's right, he had come down out of the clouds into Song Be

33:30 and I said, "That was marvellous navigation. How did you do that?" He said, "Oh, I saw a hole in the clouds and I went down." There weren't too many mountains in that area, but this was one hell of a big mountain, and he came down right beside it. He didn't know where he was. I thought, 'This bloke needs a bit of help.' I said, "When you're on your way to Bu Dop, how are you going to find it?" He said, "Oh, we just go straight out there, north west." I said "For how long?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, do you mind if I put a bit of a watch on it, so that we see

34:01 how far we are going?" Because I knew it wasn't a very long distance. So he's got this UH1B [helicopter] shaking, flat out, at ninety knots, and he's going at tree top level, because it wasn't too far. I said to him, "I worked out that it was about a six minute trip." He said, "Yeah, I would have thought that was right." I said, "Well, we've been going for nine minutes…" He said "Oh." I said, "You better have a bit of a look around soon." Then, the next thing

34:30 we broke out into savannah grassland and I let him know through the headphones that there was no grasslands in this part of Vietnam. I said, "We're in Cambodia, well and truly, I can tell you. And we're a long way in." I said "If you keep going, we'll be in Phnom Penh, shortly." So he did a quick U-turn and came back down and eventually found a road down to a town that I know, and then we climbed up the border, which was a road, and landed in Bu Dop, and they said, "We saw you go past a while ago," when we landed, and they said

35:01 "A 'Caribou' turned the wrong way off the airstrip yesterday, turned left instead of right, and the North Vietnamese put about fifty bullet holes in the tail plane." They said, "They had a crack at you, but you were going so fast and so low they didn't get you." I mean, I actually saw a Cambodian flag. We went down to look at a village and there was a Cambodian flag flying. He was a young warrant officer, flying aircraft. He could have ended up in Phnom Penh or

35:30 Pakistan or something, with this cargo. So that was the sort of degree…I mean, it was a difficult thing to do. He had also been shot at the day before, too, got a round through the fuel tank, so he was a nervous pilot. So that was another little expedition, to Bu Dop, which was a fascinating Special Forces outpost, sort of like a little Dien Bien Phu, on the border, surrounded by enemy all the time. So yeah, I think the more interesting

36:00 things are the operations, subsequently, in Vietnam. There's not too much else. Most of them were helter-skelter performances like that, all of which are useful. But I wouldn't have claimed to be an expert in Vietnam. I was just able to be more current than most people, by virtue of a privileged position, sitting as an Aussie in a British jungle warfare school and by that time the training teams were in country and gathering a lot of stuff, but not necessarily coming back to us

36:30 in Malaya, because that's through the bureaucracy and lessons learned, take a while to form, unfortunately, in any war.

In respect to gathering information and seeing what's actually happening over there, what was expected from you? Did you have to write up reports for anyone?

Is this still in my Malayan days?

Yes, and also visiting Vietnam…

Yes, I wrote reports for the commandant of the Jungle Warfare School, who was a

37:00 half colonel, a Brit guy. I didn't produce too much for anyone else, because some of it was reasonably

unofficial. I checked through our embassy, but they didn't want to know what I was doing. But I let them know, more as a courtesy, when I was in town, or in country. But originally I was there before the Training Team. And there were some exciting things, like that, for instance, the coup, that was exciting. They were historical events. I think it was May, '63,

37:30 that coup, and that was a very turbulent time in Vietnamese politics. I mean, the pilots escaped to Cambodia, they sought asylum in Cambodia, but they were trying to stir….Who knows what was behind that. But there was a series of coups and Air Marshal [Nguyen Cao] Ky was the leader. I got an insight into a lot of this

38:00 political thing subsequently, because I had another sort of roving commission, in my days with Field Force. I was able to see a lot around Hue and the north of South Vietnam, in those subsequent years. And with the background of having cultural study and religious study, and I had been at ANU at this period, and my lecturer in Asian civilisation was

38:30 a former French sergeant from Dien Bien Phu, by the name of Helmut Loofs, who was more German than the chancellor, almost, but insisted that he was a Frenchman. He spoke French with a guttural German accent. But he was writing to me and saying, "Don't kill too many North Vietnamese, and Peace on Earth, but I understand that you've got to do your job." If my mail was being censored, my letters from ANU wouldn't have been too good.

39:01 **In respect to these fact finding trips as well, the Australian Army, were you reporting back any information to them?**

Yes, but the most important part to it…Because of my liaison with Colonel Serong, and I don't wish to make too much of that either, he was a pretty busy man, he was a hotshot in Vietnam, and I was a youngster on sort of maverick missions. So I don't want to make too much of this. I was no 'Clausewitz', producing new strategies

39:31 for warfare. I was a conduit at reasonably practical levels for operational matters. But the bureaucracy tends to form its own study groups and things, so I don't know that I influenced too much in Australia. I was pretty happy to be influencing at the sharp end, right where I was, in a very relevant jungle warfare school that's got a fight on in Indonesia as well. It's got a confrontation going on.

40:00 Indonesians are parachuting into Malaysia at this stage. A lot of people don't know these sort of facts, but there were Indonesians strung up in trees in South Johor. I don't know what year that is. Possibly '63. They tried to invade Malaysia at one stage. So this was a real war going on, and yet Australia kept an embassy open in Jakarta, and Tom Critchley, our ambassador, was a very fine mediator, all through confrontation.

40:30 But we had Australians killing Indonesians in Borneo and Sarawak, in those years. It was real.

We'll just stop there.

Tape 6

00:40 **The Archive is very interested in anything you can tell us about your dealings with Colonel Serong. You mentioned that you had a relationship, of sorts, with him while you were in Vietnam on those observation tours. Can you tell us any more about what kind of man he was, from your point of view?**

01:02 Yes, I mentioned that his daughter was at General Daly's funeral, just recently, and it sparked a memory….She said, "My father talked about you quite a bit." I wasn't close to him, except he was very forthcoming when I was first there with in, I suppose, 1962, that would be the start of the Training Team.

01:30 He immediately took me into General Harkin's weekly briefing, which I found fascinating. I didn't open my mouth, of course. It was interesting to see how much influence he had with the American senior officers. That is well known. And, in fact, he briefed Congress at one stage, himself. He and I went to a place called Duc My,

02:03 that was a camp area near Nha Trang, which was a very beautiful area. It used to be called the Riveria of the Orient. And we went in….As an indication of how strong he was, he hadn't been there terribly long I don't think. Anyway, we were in General Harkin's personal plane, which was a 'Beach Craft Bonanza', with two engines, fortunately, because we lost one somewhere over near Dalat.

02:30 It's a very sort of plush commercial five seater prop…Which you'd call executive, except it's not a jet. Anyway, we were in this aeroplane and we lost power. We got to Duc My, no problem, but he said, "We have got a small problem." I said, "What's that?" And the pilot said, "Well, you can't take off on one engine. You can land but you can't take off."

03:00 Which we should have known. So once again, we did a tour of the base. The Training Team had just

moved in, so I think that was mid-62. We did a tour of the base and then lo and behold, General Harkins whistles up an aeroplane that I hadn't seen before, which is a lean mean shark looking aeroplane, which was called the 'Caribou'. It was the first time I had seen them. A short take off and landing aircraft. In use in the Australian Army for the next forty years. We hadn't brought them at this stage.

03:31 So in rattles this 'Caribou' onto a landing strip that we landed on, which was a football field, about a hundred and ten yards long. Probably a soccer field when I come to think of it, because the goalposts weren't as high. But I thought, 'This is interesting…' Anyway, the 'Caribou' took off with just the two of us aboard and went straight up, like a jetfighter. That's when I learned about short take-off and landing aircraft. Very useful for the next

04:01 say forty years in Asia particularly. And that's a measure of Serong's influence if you like. Personally, he was an enigma to a lot of people. A mysterious Asian background, maybe. He certainly looked Asian. Possibly Burmese. He had come from helping the Burma government in their revolutionary war, which is still going on, to Saigon, as I recall, to be recalled to Australian duty.

04:30 He was a contemporary of, General Brogan, when he was chief of general staff, and I was his MA, military assistant. I don't think he was terribly well liked by the generals, because he was such a maverick. But my impression is that he didn't really care too much about that. He went on with his revolutionary warfare ways. And the only other occasion I was involved with him was as commandant at Canungra, which is pretty impersonal,

05:00 back when we were cadets there in our final year. So I can't say that I knew him well. But he's always intrigued me, and his simple answer to a complex problem with the Americans, which to me was almost….Almost humorous. He wasn't humorous, but they all believed it was wisdom from on high. So he certainly did have this aura that allowed him to say simple things, and everybody bowed and praised him.

05:30 And that's a marvellous character. I suspect that he was a very good actor, as are all generals.

You returned to Australia, and you returned to Duntroon as an instructor, in '64…

Yes, company commander, instructor in military history and military law and importantly rugby coach. I replaced Kevin Newman who subsequently became a minister in

06:00 the Fraser government. He was a classmate of mine. And that was a stimulating period. I enjoyed it immensely. The cadets were good and bright and it was rewarding. And I decided to formalise my knowledge of the Malay language. Well actually, Kevin Newman convinced me to do it. He was doing Indonesian 1 at ANU, it was called Malayan-Indonesian. And so I signed up initially just to do the language, and to keep my brain active

06:30 and I ended up turning it into an honours degree, but I didn't do the thesis. So I got the pass degree at honour's level, ten years later. So that was nice, because I went though from Indonesian languages into Asian civilisation, then finished majoring in political science, which was in the late '60s, early '70s, when I was back again at army headquarters. University life was interesting, especially as

07:01 Vietnam was, in the '64 to '66, Vietnam was not a strong issue, so it must have been my time later at the university that all the dissent was there, and people were throwing smoke bombs. I did something to quell the social problems of ANU and Duntroon. I was on duty one night when the

07:30 students invaded the parade ground and did all sorts of terrible desecrating things like drawing signs and things on the parade ground. A continuing thing between the old university college and then the ANU, continuing nice healthy conflict between the two young groups of men of Canberra. It involved sort of women and turf wars and all sorts of things. Not terribly significant, but a lot of fun and not much damage.

08:01 However, then Duntroon….one night, I was duty officer, the cadets marched down the main drag into the university with masks and quite a number of extraordinarily disguises, but everyone knew they were Duntroon, as they were in step and they had short hair. They proceeded to slightly ransack the buildings and take hostage a couple of young women, who I think hid in the chapel.

08:30 Quite a little furore, the Canberra Times made much of it, of course. Doctor Bruce Kent, who had been a colleague of mine at the university, was the warden at Bruce Hall. So we became part of the scheme to stop all this gang warfare. And we developed a thing called Amnesty Day, in which people pushed a big football around and played various games. I don't know how long it lasted. There was a trophy for it the first year, and it got rid of some of the youthful enthusiasm, but I think it died a natural death. The

09:00 antipathy was still there, until Duntroon became almost not visible in the big context of university campus by the '70s, Duntroon wasn't worth badgering. A footnote to that was that at one stage the university students rang the Canberra police to tell them that somebody impersonating university students was going to Duntroon and they had to ignore the warning, in which case then a fire engine appeared on the parade ground. It was a double bluff. So these 'boys games' continued for two or three years, in the '60s,

09:31 but I was central in attempting to heal it. The university campus itself was pretty active. But as I recall it, no great dissent, because the year was only 1966, when I left Duntroon and went to join the battalion

in Vietnam anyway.

I'll just skip forward a moment to when you were back at the ANU later on. You mentioned that there were quite substantial student

10:00 **protest movements at that time….**

I didn't actually encounter any, that I recall. I think I'm just talking about newspapers and rioting and…I think Monash [University] was a hotbed, rather than ANU. I think ANU was regarded as almost a bureaucrats' university. The fellows weren't dirty enough. They wore shoes and they were relatively clean. But I do

10:30 know that there was a hotbed group. I mentioned, fairly facetiously, the Desmond Ball aspect, in my earlier comments, and people plotting to blow up then the rising phallic symbol in Canberra of the Black Mountain Tower. And certainly there was a lot of union activity and protest about it. The students decided to align themselves with it, and at one stage there was a plot. I don't think anybody produced any explosives. I think it was all good university talk. But that was symptomatic of dissent,

11:02 I guess, and these years would be '69, '70, maybe '71. So, I have a clear memory of that.

Having been over to Vietnam by that stage yourself, and having fought there, what was your reaction to the public disquiet at the time?

I wasn't too impressed with the idea of people throwing paint all over the soldiers. That was

11:30 appalling. And that happened to the 1st Battalion, so actually….The 1st Battalion arrived back in 1965 or '66…I think that was Sydney. And a colleague of mine was leading the group, and yes, there was red paint thrown over them. So that shows there was some form of active protest. And LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of The United States] came out here, some time, with his brash Texas performances, possibly '68, and the, "All The Way With LBJ."

12:00 Because Harold Holt…That's right, Harold disappeared in early '68, so that must have been the '67 visit. That's while I was in Vietnam. But there were people lying under trucks and things, then, I think, so that's when I was in Vietnam. We certainly weren't impressed with all that. The unions wouldn't load some boats, the usual things. I remember people in Vietnam being angry at that. And of course it was stupid and

12:30 it was token protests about the war. I didn't march. When I came back, I was on my way back in in a hurry, and then out to Pakistan to Quetta, the staff college. So I didn't have a public arrival back. People didn't really understand the war properly, I don't think, or soldiers felt they didn't and felt all embittered about it. But I didn't pause too long about that. It would have been nice

13:00 to have had people a little more forthcoming. That's why 1987 subsequently, whatever it was called, was a very important year for Vietnam veterans, because that's when people really started talking about it properly, and sensibly, and Australia recognised the contribution.

We may as well go on to talking about how you ended up in Vietnam, as company commander.

13:30 **What were the circumstances that led to you joining…**

It was just a normal posting situation. I mean, I was slotted to go just as soon as I could be freed up from any commitments. We were starting to build up the force and I was obviously one of the younger commanders and presumably designated to be a battalion commander subsequently, so the system had to get me to war as soon as possible. I had no

14:00 qualms about that. I was very ready to go. I was very aware of Indo-Chinese, Vietnamese rights, if you like, in the situation. Ho Chi Minh was a Nationalist before he was a Communist. But, there were a million people in the South, at least, many millions, who had voted

14:30 to move South, to practise their religion and also to get away from Communism. So to me, the task of the Australians in particular….I've extended your question into a philosophical…But the task was to let people get their produce to war, to market, and to not have their throats cut by people who were intent on disrupting the community. And to me this was a fairly simple equation of the South…

15:00 And the North versus the South. And if you like, Communism versus….the Free World, for lack of a better word. I wasn't naive enough to….I had been a student enough of strategic plans and things to understand that there were many nuances in nationalism and that nobody was right and nobody was wrong in the whole thing. I had admired the Vietnamese throwing off of the French yoke, and

15:30 really carving out a Nationalist business. But Ho Chi Minh was in the business of killing about half a million people, to unify the country, if you like. As a result, a lot more than half a million died in the war over many years, which had actually been going on since about 1937, or 1945, whichever way you look at it.

Your personal thoughts on going to war. Did you have a wife by this stage?

16:00 I had a wife and child, a four year old child. In fact, she was the one who came in front of me when I came back and said, “Where have you been?” And she maintains that she cried herself to sleep…So there was a big impact on her, and she laughingly accuses me of all sorts of things, these days, but my wife confirmed that she really did have a hole in her life that was her daddy, and it had a significant effect on her. She is a very well adjusted girl, who had a big mad birthday party last weekend, actually.

16:31 She’s very well adjusted, but she makes reference to it occasionally, and it was very real to her.

Had you got married while you were working in Canberra or before…

I was actually married when I went to Malaya, so I got married when I was adjutant of the 2nd RAR just before I went to Malaya, and Kristianne was born just when we got back to Duntroon in 1964. So I was married in 1961.

17:02 We came back on a boat, and my wife was about eight months pregnant on the boat. You’re not allowed to travel when you’re eight months pregnant, but we did.

Did the roles of professional military officer and father and husband become a little bit conflicting, at that point? When you went to war?

Absolutely. But unfortunately, in retrospect, the military won. I was a very good soldier and officer, and my family got badly neglected. Starting with Duntroon days, in particular,

17:31 I suppose that’s because when the child was born. In fact, she was born the night I was commanding the guard at the opening of Parliament. But I went up to the mess, I didn’t have television, couldn’t afford it, went up to the mess to watch myself on parade. Lord deLisle was the governor general, I think. Because I had been in the jungle

18:00 for a few years, and some idiot decided that I should carry a sword and wear a ceremonial uniform. And that was a bit new to me again, so I wanted to see how it turned out. While I was up there I got a phone call to say that my wife had pains. So I went back and said, “You couldn’t be going into labour.” She did, and we drove into the hospital. I said, “I will pick you up in a couple of hours’ time.” And our daughter was born a few hours later. In those days you didn’t go and hold your wife’s hand in a hospital while the child was born. So it was that sort of neglect, and I wasn’t exactly

18:30 progressive. Some of my friends were more progressive than I, but I was a pretty straight soldier. So the family suffered obviously to some extent, in the pull between duty and family.

What considerations or discussions did you have with your wife before you left to go on your tour into Vietnam?

Oh, I don’t think we touched on any of those dangerous subjects, I fear. We just accepted…Just the same as she accepted

19:01 a padre and a colonel coming up the steps on a Sunday morning to deliver a telegram that said, “Your husband has been wounded in Vietnam.” I mean, it’s almost the classic British Army, ‘stiff upper lip’, World War 11, “Your son’s lost in the battle over Germany.” I couldn’t believe that the army did that. Delivered a telegram…Well fortunately the padre was a good friend of mine, and this colonel. But unbeknownst to me,

19:32 I had just been shot up in a chopper, checking a battle area, which was connected with Bribie, but also I had sunk some boats on an ambush and I wanted to see, because no-one in the Vietnamese Navy would tell me what was on the boats. Some of my colleagues in rabid Australian humour called me a ‘Fishermen Killer’, you see, and so I was a bit interested to see what there was. And we got shot up on the way back and I got hit in the eye and the nose a bit, in a little ‘possum’ chopper [Sioux] which

20:01 tends to get a little brittle, when thirty calibre rounds are coming through the plastic. When they repaired the chopper the next day, they found a thirty calibre round under the seat. And to this day, I don’t know whether it was under the pilot’s seat or mine. It was embedded in the tubing. Yes so, this was an action and the commanding officer said’ “What did you do?” when I got back. I said’ “I called some artillery in but we mainly got the hell out of there.” Because I actually saw the flash, I saw this thirty calibre shooting at us, and

20:30 we were flying low and slow, because the stupid pilot had run low on petrol, fuel. So I was reported as a casualty, unbeknownst to me. The battalion doctor picked some metal/stuff out of my nose and eye. We were on a long operation, a month long operation. And there I am, unbeknownst to me, in the Canberra Times, ‘Star Footballer Injured In Vietnam’ all this sort of stuff. I hadn’t said anything to anyone. It was business as usual, and I started getting letters from Canberra, from this colonel. Subsequently General Norrie,

21:00 saying, “Keep your head down, and be a good fellow and soldier on.” And I couldn’t work why this stupid correspondence was going on for about a week, until I discovered that I had been in the Canberra Times and telegrams delivered to my wife. And the time lag between letters was so bad, and we were out on operations anyway. So I just looked like a fool, ‘stiff upper lip stuff’, I’m not telling anybody that I’ve been hit. Because I didn’t report it, the CO reported it, for record/compensation purposes. And I would have been angry

21:30 if a digger had not reported it, but I was fireproof and I didn't need any sort of little consoling. But it was a ridiculous situation where I looked like a pseudo hero, and in fact my wife went through anguish. So that was the social side of casualties in Vietnam. It hadn't helped that the fellow over our back fence was a good friend of mine, Peter Badcoe, got a posthumous VC and his wife was living behind us, and that had been the previous year. So there

22:00 was an atmosphere of tension for the women in the families, which is terrible. But we weren't even cognizant of it, I fear.

Before you left for Vietnam, were you completely up to date with what was going on over there, or was it a surprise when you arrived?

No, I think we were pretty well briefed. We would have had almost…I wouldn't say daily 'sit reps' [situation reports], that's not right, but I think

22:31 we were very well aware of things and I knew that I was going. I knew from six months before that I was going. So I virtually just finished off a year sort of with cadets, and departed in about November.

And how did you get over there?

When I was due to go, there was an air strike was on, a Qantas air strike so I took a

23:00 Philippine Airlines flight to Manila. I was in uniform, I was wearing 'greens' [camouflage], but my weapon was down the back in the hold. Sir John Wilton [Chairman Chiefs Of Staff, now known as CDF] was on board the plane. That was another story. When we landed, they kept looking for an important general for the guard of honour at Manila airport. And the only person they could see in uniform was me, so they tried to give me the job. So I ran around behind the plane and Sir

23:30 John went out in his brown felt hat, took the salute, and he didn't know that it was given to me before I got off the plane. I had one fellow who had never been north of Devonport with me, going off to war. I don't know quite how he managed it, but he was a postal orderly. I locked him in a room for a few days, because he was getting in a bit of trouble in the Philippines and tried to find an aeroplane to get to Vietnam. I eventually hitch-hiked with the Americans from Clark Field outside Manila and took my lance corporal who I had locked in a room

24:01 with suitable company, and took him off to war. So I took a draft of one person to war to join the 6th Battalion.

Why was he causing trouble?

Oh, he had never been north of Devonport, and Manila was a pretty big city, and there were lots of beautiful ladies around him. So I just decided to corral him or I would have never got him to war. So I locked him in his room. But he wasn't complaining…

Where was the battalion when you arrived?

24:31 At Nui Dat, in the base. I took over from a fellow called Noel Ford, who I already mentioned disappeared subsequently, and I was very well welcomed into the battalion. But the CO was an interesting fellow, Colin Townsend, known as 'Mousey', because he was quite small. A very good commanding officer. I didn't know him well. But I had a good run and I knew the company commanders very well.

25:00 So it was up and running pretty quickly.

You had been into Vietnam before, but had you been down into Phuoc Tuy[?] and…

No, it wasn't an area of interest. We occupied it…There were no Allied Forces there, interesting. The ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] were looking after it. It was almost strictly Catholic community. All from

25:30 the North. There were plenty of problems there, but just no-one had got to them. So the Americans allocated it, and the Australians took it because it had the port of Vung Tau, and then took over and really went about the job of protecting the local population and yet, marauding out against North Vietnamese forces when we could find them. To that end, I had the professor at ANU, Dr Loofs who was counselling me to not kill too many Vietnamese,

26:00 and to not be too diligent, I suppose if you like. So I didn't have any problems that we were doing a job that was very necessary. Somebody had to do it. So on the tactical level, I was happy. In the strategic area, I was questioning lots of things, but maybe more later, rather than pre-1966.

What were your first impression on arriving in Nui Dat?

26:33 It was a bit of a god forsaken defence location and boring tents everywhere, and Diggers in pretty….not so much rain-filled trenches, but not great hygiene. It was the dry season. It was a bit depressing. There were the odd brick buildings that were left over from the plantation there. I think we even had a brick shower area in my company, somehow.

27:02 It was a little structure left and we just put buckets up. But it was….people wanted to get out of camp.

And of course we were different to the Americans. We didn't have any Vietnamese inside the lines, other than interpreters. So we didn't have a lot of facilities, and that was very sensible. And also we carried our weapons with us, everywhere. The first time I went into an American establishment, you had to check your weapon in, like at a hotel.

27:31 The most extraordinary…I said, "Why is this?" They said, "Because they might shoot each other after a few beers." The Wild West. If anyone ever says Australians and Americans were the same, just look at Vietnam. Our soldiers went everywhere with a weapon, because they had to be ready. The Americans weren't allowed to have weapons in their base areas, because they might shoot each other.

Who showed you the ropes? Was your predecessor there to hand over? What happened when you arrived?

28:03 **Very vague…I'm not sure….Yes, I think he must have been there, and I think I must have had two days with him. He was going back to attend the staff college. And I'm taking over a working unit that has been worked up very well. So it's not easy. And he was very popular. He was a low-key character, but he was very popular with the troops. He was no personality boy, and the**

28:30 **CO was very fond of him, too. So it was quite a task to get on top of that. Just with the platoon commanders and…Yeah, it was an interesting challenge, because he had always been a sort of a….lesser light. But he had always been a quiet operator. I had served with him before. But he had done a marvellous job with this company. And they had had a couple of pretty**

29:00 **good stoushes, too, and they came through pretty well,**

Who were the fellows who were most important to you? Your 2IC or….

The 2IC was a long-term friend of mine, a rugby colleague and I would call him a family friend. He actually took over the company from me, subsequently, when I went back to Australia. Yeah, he was important. But a 2IC's role is more like administrative. The company sergeant major is very important. We didn't have one,

29:31 that didn't help. One had gone home and one was missing. I eventually, a day before major operations in February, I stole a support company sergeant major. A marvellous man, Keith Davidson, a quiet achiever, and I kept him for quite a while, I needed him. And he died just recently in Perth, much to my sadness. He became RSM of the 6th Battalion, yes he did, on a subsequent tour.

30:02 A very fine soldier. The platoon commander is very important, of course. I never had three officers, we were always short. I had a platoon sergeant, Brady, who was a good guy, but he was always in trouble. I had a national service second lieutenant, who performed very well. And I had an unusually commissioned other second lieutenant. But they were competent.

30:31 Inexperienced, but competent. And when the chips were down, it worked pretty well.

What was basically the role of a company commander in Vietnam? Can you briefly explain what you were in there to do?

It's often been said that it was a platoon and section commanders' war. But it was, at many stages of the time, it was a company commanders' war. It was almost never a battalion commander or a brigade commanders' war. But

31:00 I found it was certainly a company commanders' war for me, on a couple of days. We had to operate a very tight knit little group. And we moved as a company, we ambushed as a company, quite often. We also…I sent them out as independent platoons. But we were theoretically supposed to be within artillery range. I wasn't too aware of that, actually. We might have strayed

31:30 outside range, occasionally. We were certainly on maximum range a number of times. That means that the guns back at Nui Dat…and I think it was something like a fifteen thousand metre range, from memory, at best. Of course, the Americans had enormous guns, which could be on call. But you were really more comfortable using your own guns. We had problems with our artillery anyway, with the New Zealand battery. And that wasn't good. And so, I certainly

32:00 kept a tight hold on the platoon commanders. And there were various things. The first issue of 'Time Life Australia' had an article on my company. And the reporters travelled for four days with us. I wasn't exactly pleased about that. The PR [Public Relations] officer in the Task Force was so thrilled when he said, "We've got an

32:30 operator, the head of the Time Life bureau in Hong Kong, with us, as a correspondent." Marvellous man. Plus a freelance photographer, who featured in the Tet Offensive. He made millions of dollars from the 'Tet Offensive'. A fellow named Swanson. But the PR bloke said, "Now give them every access they want. Talk shop to them." I said, "Look, I just don't want them around. But if they are…" This was just out on a company patrol, a four day patrol….It turned out to be a fairly boring patrol, and

33:00 we were short of water. I had to actually helicopter a re-supply, at one stage, which we never wanted to do. We just couldn't find water anywhere. And they wrote a very interesting article on the company and talked about the tensions between the platoon commander and the company commander, because I was

trying to keep them like chicks, if you like, a bit under control, and also look after them. A very good insight. The writing was excellent.

33:30 The trouble is the photographer took so many brilliant photos that the writing got cut a bit, but I saw the original draft by the correspondent, and it was a marvellous story of the tensions, even on a patrol where you weren't shot at for days, the tensions internally and externally of suspense, and waiting….For instance, on another patrol I had a kid, just new, a point scout, and I used to rotate them fairly quickly, and I would not tell the platoon commander

34:00 who would be his point scout, but this kid was pretty new and we were in a no fire zone, and suddenly there as a blur across the front and this kid 'dropped' what turned out to be a twenty-year-old attractive girl. Stone dead. At about eighty yards in the bushes, which wasn't too bad. And eventually we found a little old man who was her grandfather, cowering in the bushes. But we had to carry the girl's body for quite a while, and we were getting back near a village and we ran into a 'Stars & Stripes'[US Military newspaper] reporter,

34:31 with some Yanks, and suddenly he saw her dead body and started to take notes. And at one stage, I heard one of the soldiers who had been crying earlier, at the thought that we had killed a girl, it wasn't the bloke who shot her…although it could have been, and then I heard that same guy say, "Well, we've carried her for so long, she's stiff enough, she can walk herself now…" And this was Australian's sort of sardonic humour, if you like, but I saw

35:00 this reporter start scribbling and I said, "You put that pen away. These bastards have been crying over this. We don't think she's VC [Viet Cong], but she was in a no fire zone." Anyway, we got the report back from the village mayor about a week later and the old man was arrested, they were couriers, coming through the area, and the cover was the old man. So we left it with the Vietnamese authorities. But that made me feel better about it, it made the kid feel better. But it was

35:30 indicative of the tension and the drama. So that's it. You've got a kid…The platoon commander was quite able to handle him. He was a national servicemen himself, that platoon commander, but the sort of stresses, the psychological stresses, and the bravado. And of course, the odd macho bloke in a platoon and company who wants to shoot everything in sight. All that's a pretty delicate little balance between preserving…

36:01 preserving watchfulness, carefulness, but not firing too much from the hip, and using a bit of brains at times. An enormously difficult thing for us was the truce periods, whereby we couldn't shoot unless we were shot at, which were appalling rules of engagement, because who is to know whether someone's waving a stick at dusk, a stick or a rifle, if it's failing

36:30 light. And you're putting an onus on a kid, out front. He's got no time to talk to anyone. "Do I shoot or not? Or am I dead?" So those truce periods, when they moved hundreds of thousands of troops, at various stages, during the truce, were very unfair. Like the 'Tet' [Chinese New Year]. The Tet of '67, not the Tet of '68. They were very difficult for us. The rules of engagement made life tough. Some people took a lot

37:00 more notice than others, but we were certainly very scrupulous. There weren't very many civilians that I can think of that suffered as a result of 6RAR actions. The one that I know of was a courier.

Just on the organisation of the company, you worked down through your platoon commanders. You kept control over them….

When we were on the move, and in the base, of course. That was simple.

37:31 **Who was breathing down your neck from above? Did you report directly to the battalion?**

Yes, the battalion commander. But certainly when we were on the move, or in contact, he was breathing down my neck, but he wasn't otherwise. We moved as a battalion quite a bit. In fact, the lead company in the major operation that I got hit on, we were the lead company on the first day, and we hit another… We just kept being able to find the enemy, unfortunately, and we hit a North

38:00 Vietnamese covering force and I had two blokes killed, on the first morning. And then we were running late for an ambush position, which was by the river, so I had to get into that ambush position at night, across with about three inches of free board, across the mouth of the Song Rai River. I could have had about a hundred guys drowned if there had been any sort of great turbulence in the water. I had to get onto a beach, and then I had to un-reconnoitre, just back up, and hope there was nothing behind me.

38:30 And that's when we encountered these boats in the morning, these re-supply boats, they were coming straight at us, and I tried to get permission to open fire, and the Task Force staff officer was a good friend of mine and he said "We'll put a plane up at first light." And I said "They'll be here by then. They'll be amongst us. So I never got permission to fire, but I did, and we sunk three of the five boats, with fifty calibre and thirty calibre from the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] of our blokes. And I was trying to find out what was in the boats, a month later, when

39:01 the next thing, I got hit in the chopper. And somewhere around that time was 'Operation Robin',[?] too….Actually it was before it.

We have to change tapes….

Tape 7

00:44 **The operation where you sunk those three boats, why were you sent out?**

I was the advance group of a month long operation, called ‘Operation Portsea’, this was in March, I think, 1967.

01:03 Our specific task on the first night was to ambush the Song Rai River, which was about fifteen kilometres south-east of Nui Dat. On the way, somewhere down near the beach, we struck a very determined force and that’s when we launched a company attack up this hill. A couple of the fellows who

01:30 were hit, died together seven days later, which was very sad. There was about an hour or two delay in the dust-off helicopter coming, and months later I got all sorts of letters or comments or things that said they were left too long on the ground. They weren’t expected to die, and it’s tragic, both of them died in the hospital in Vung Tau, within an hour of each other.

02:05 The dust-off system was very efficient, and that wasn’t the reason that they died, but it was a pretty sad footnote.

What happened?

They were just hit in the attack up the hill and it was an attack….We were in APCs, but we dismounted for the attack, because it was too tough. For once we had APCs,

02:30 whereas a month earlier in ‘Operation Bribie’ we didn’t have APCs until late in the day and we lost one of those anyway. But it was a foot assault and it was a very….We subsequently learnt they were covering a divisional headquarters. There was this notion that we were fighting the Viet Cong, but this was a divisional operation, and these guys stayed put and fought, once again. Which wasn’t in the script. They normally left to sort of

03:00 preserve themselves and run away. Just as had happened in earlier attacks I had been involved in near the Cambodian border. So these guys hadn’t read the script. They were covering very senior people in the area. We stumbled upon them, and they stayed to fight, a rear guard action. So that left us late, crossing the Song Rai. That’s why we had to cross in darkness. There are some very graphic photographs there of us crossing the Song Rai, with very little free board, and then

03:30 mounting up to an assault position. One of the aims was…Re-supply was driving everyone mad. There was obvious re-supply going on the whole way down to Vung Tau. The wretched bastards even had searchlights, they were so blatant about their re-supply. All night, we could see this re-supply going on, down from our ambush position. And then when the boats came chugging in in the morning, which was a known re-supply point, sure enough, they were spot on, they were heading right for us. I had no idea what was behind me. I could have been….

04:01 We were so late getting in, I couldn’t check it out. So when the boats came in, and soon as we could see them clearly enough, we sank them. And they were narrow boats….Why were they coming into the Song Rai River at first light if it wasn’t to re-supply? There was no-one living there, so where the people were that they were trying to re-supply, I don’t know. But they obviously buzzed off when they heard our armoured personnel carrier come in. So it was a very vulnerable feeling, sitting up on a forward slope at night.

04:30 And then asking permission to open fire….I don’t recall the rules of engagement. I presume I was meant to ask permission, or why the hell did I do it? But at three or four a.m. I started trying to get permission. I said I could hear boats coming. This guy was a good friend of mine, I’ve nigged him since a few times. I said, “Why did you hold me?” He said, “We would have put a plane up at first light.” Well, that’s useless. That was back at Nui Dat I was talking to him. I said, “That’s no good. They’re going to be landing amongst us. We’ll be having a picnic together.”

05:03 So we opened up…Probably with thirty calibre…

I understand you were meant to be looking for a submarine?

Well, one of our briefs was that there was a Chinese Communist submarine in the area, and we were to engage it if it did appear. Pretty stupid. So I asked for armour piercing ammunition, and was told no, we couldn’t have armour piercing ammunition,

05:31 because if the troops lost it, it would be used against us. A little like the mines were subsequently done in the minefield area. And so, I just accepted it. You took most of this with a grain of salt. I wasn’t really expecting a Chinese submarine to come up. I wouldn’t have been too happy if it had, but it would have been nice to have had a trophy. We were known as the ‘Phantoms’. My company was called the Phantoms. We had the skull as the symbol of my company. I think it was because our blokes were pretty good at stealing stuff.

06:00 From the Americans and everyone else. So we were known as the Phantoms. One bloke went a bit too far and produced a skull, from somewhere out on operations and put it up on the bar. I got word of it in about an hour and we got rid of it. That was too clever. But no, we had a pretty good tight ship, and Phantoms operated well.

Before you actually crossed the Song Rai, you got held up by this attack,

06:30 **what happened? Did you actually overcome the attack? Or did you withdraw?**

No, no. They ran away, they got away. They were very quick. My marvellous sergeant major, one of those things of war, he was on an APC around the back of the area, and was just cruising a bit, but not wanting to get in the way of the fire, and about half an hour after we moved off again, he said, "Did you send a group of fellows around that side?"

07:00 I said, "No." He said, "Oh, shit." So they saw them on their way out, but they didn't fire because they thought they were our blokes. Once again, it was a problem. Mostly they were in black uniforms, but not always. They'd put on any uniform if they could get away with it. But he was a very good soldier. I haven't told many people that, but it was just one of those things, he just wasn't sure…And didn't even raise it at the time. I mean, he would

07:30 have been in radio contact with me, we would have all been pretty busy, or should have been, and so… "I know where they went." But we didn't, they were very quick. And once we're encumbered, if you like, with APCs and things, we're not as mobile as if we're….They're almost a menace in a way, in close country. It was sort of beachy, scruffy country. Not right on the beach, but can't have been too far because the landing zone for the choppers

08:00 was actually on the beach. So we were pretty well…We were only about ten 'ks' [kilometres] out from Nui Dat, but we were probably at least five to ten ks from the Song Rai River. And we were probably held up for three or four hours over the whole thing, including evacuation of casualties. That's why we crossed the Song Rai River in the dark. One of my most exciting moments, dreading that somebody would drown, or some would go under. They don't float too well, those things.

08:30 Anything up to fourteen or sixteen soldiers in them, with equipment, and a pretty fast flowing river, too.

Just in respect to identification, was that one of the major problems, working out who the enemy was?

It was. Having said that, I think they did have a sort of jungle 'green', too. They weren't always in black pyjamas, that's for sure. And also when you're sweat stained,

09:00 jungle green looks black, and when it's filthy, when you've been out in the bush for a month. They had the conical hats, obviously, but you didn't find too many of them fighting in conical hats. The peasants wore them, and they wore them at various stages along the track, because they were good protection from the sun. Identification, certainly. And being sure.

09:30 We did have one tragedy….Whereby a kid was just a bit slow coming back, as the sentry at the back just moving, on a Saturday morning in January, and suddenly you hear a burst of fire and think 'Oh, they got someone.' But in fact, it was a kid rushing back to join his section in a platoon patrol, and he copped about six rounds

10:01 in a two inch…You couldn't get a gunner to put six shots in a two inch square, more than one time in a thousand, and this was right through your own mate's bloody heart. It's pretty tough. But that's the degree of tension. It's inexplicable. Saturday morning, ten o'clock, I can see it now. I was down about two kilometres from it, and heard this burst of fire, and then nothing, but that dreadful silence and

10:30 you know something is wrong. Yeah, that was it. And it was just because people had gone past a checkpoint and hadn't noticed this guy was still sitting there, and then he suddenly thought, 'Shit, I've lost them.' And instead of very carefully going, or even calling out his name, he rushes back, somebody comes down the track. It was only about forty metres, in close country. Copped him straight through the heart. Good shooting….

11:01 **if I understand correctly, the tensions even at Nui Dat were pretty high?**

Yes. There were fellows happy to have a beer when there were people on the perimeter. But no, inside the wire there was a degree of security. Whilst we carried weapons with us, that was for good common sense purposes, you just didn't leave your weapon, whether you went for a drink or a feed or a shower or what.

11:31 I'm pretty sure we took them to showers, too.

The New Zealand Artillery. Can you tell me about some of the problems you had there?

Yes, well, we had another clear sunny morning, I think it was a Monday or a Tuesday, and I was standing with

12:01 second lieutenant John O'Halloran and we heard some rounds go over….Actually, I thought that you

could almost see them, and it was a lovely clear morning, and suddenly through the headsets I heard people screaming. And 'D' Company, which had gone through Long Tan five months earlier, the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] was killed, John Kirby, he was a great mate of mine, he was an instructor at the Jungle Warfare School in Malaya, he got a Distinguished Conduct

12:30 Medal at Long Tan, he was killed. Three or four others were killed. One officer had his arm torn off, and there was an investigation and I think a young New Zealand officer was sent home, but it was an endemic problem. There was some pretty….not careless, just not up to the mark, standards in one of the batteries,

13:00 which we believe was the New Zealand battery, and it was. And a lot of good guys in 'D' Company were killed for what was just a harassing fire mission. On Good Friday morning, a few months later, we had some prisoners and it was the afternoon, a Thursday, and I held back, I let the company go on, I just kept a few guys with me,

13:30 I was interrogating some prisoners, with an interpreter and I'd said to this young second lieutenant, "Site the company," and it was only a few hundred yards away, and when I got there it was just about last light and they were sited all around a track junction. Now, in this manual that I've talked about, the World War 1 manuals that we had when we were in training, you never ever site an organisation on an intersection of two major roads, because that's

14:00 where gunners would have pinpointed them. When I got in there, they had half dug their scrapes and they were almost ready to cook a meal, and I said, "Fellows, move!" And they all screamed and moaned and carried on, and I moved them about two hundred metres north of this track junction, based up again. And about three o'clock in the morning on Good Friday, suddenly the heavens opened and artillery came screaming in.

14:30 Well, projectiles came screaming in and hit just over our head and splashed forward. I wasn't smart enough, I called in rockets, that was your first thought, one twenty one mill they had, and fortunately a young corporal, Artillery bloke, grabbed the handpiece and screamed, "Stop!" Soon after that the firing stopped, and he had screamed into an Artillery hand piece of ours.

15:03 They told the gunners to stay where they were, it was our Artillery, and we believe that only one battery had reloaded their guns and they couldn't say where they were pointing because they reloaded and hadn't heard the order. I know the upshot was that in the morning the platoon commanders came and kissed my feet, particularly O'Halloran, because if we had been at the track junction….What it was, it was obviously our Artillery zeroing in

15:30 on the track junction, which happened to be exactly one thousand kilometres north of the 'Bribie' contact, which was a known area where they operated, so they had been doing harassing fire to keep everybody awake on Good Friday morning, and it would have written off my company…So a stroke of luck, that. So the artillery was a problem, our locations were a problem. We didn't have GPS [Global Positioning Satellites] and all that sort of thing, so some of us had map reading errors.

16:01 There wasn't good feeling. The New Zealanders had a lot of Maoris, there were young officers, young second lieutenants in the New Zealand battery, and it was, I believe, as a result of that they formed the ANZAC [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] Battalion, which had a New Zealand company inside the Australian battalion from there on. In fact, we were replaced by the ANZAC Battalion. That was a very good thing. It got people together again, and stopped any nonsense, if there was any. We're great friends with the New Zealanders and it was just a temporary time, a problem.

16:34 **Just in your first story that you mentioned, where a few of these fellows who'd fought in Long Tan got injured and killed, on what operation was that particular event?**

It was either January or February or March, I don't think it was Operation Portsea, which was the one that I led out with and where I was hit.

17:03 I don't know…It wasn't a big operation. It was a one or two day 'op'. It's pretty well documented. We had our problems and every organisation has them, but we just had to live with them, and we didn't advertise them too much. If there were accidental deaths,

17:30 like that kid, we reported them as Killed In Action, then. The system might be changed. I don't know which was the better system. I was able to write letters to parents saying, as with almost every one of mine, "Your son died bravely," and I got some marvellous letters back from parents saying, "I don't agree with the war, but thank you very much, and thank you for telling us." By and large I had very good communication with grieving parents.

18:00 So I think that system of just saying, "Killed In Action" was a pretty good one. There can be too much information, that is my belief. I'm all for transparency, but there are just certain things are left better… Unless there has been criminal negligence, or something. Especially if it is an accident within your own…This happened, this is war. Journalists go to Balboa and places

18:30 like that, and suddenly find out it's not 'tomato sauce' when they die in the crossfire. It's a tough game. People die in training and people die in operations. And of course, the 'friendly fire'….If it's in the Gulf, it's just hideous, and you would think avoidable. It's so inexplicable, some of them, but you talk of my outfit, ten o'clock on a Saturday morning, with a patrol on its own, everyone having trained together

and lived together for twelve, eighteen months. That shows you how easy it is for

19:00 it to happen. Because it's not negligence, it's not anything other than tension, and bloody good shooting in this case, which is so ironic, because most of the shooting is bloody awful.

Just in respect to Nui Dat, you mentioned with the Americans, they had to basically put their guns in so they wouldn't shoot one another. Was there any occasions at Nui Dat, where fellows in a sense, the tension got too much…

Not too my direct knowledge, and certainly not in my time, but I believe that afterwards

19:30 there were and there are some examples of disciplining. And later on, when there wasn't enough action. When people are being shot at, there's no time for any nonsense. It's the hardest time in life. That's why East Timor would have been such a difficult operation. Nobody shot at them the whole time. That makes it even harder to keep morale and not punch each other out. And then you've got women, even. And that's another story again.

You also mentioned a guy called

20:00 **Swanson, during the Tet Offensive, who made his millions…**

He was a freelance photographer with Time Life. Swanson, I think Dick. He was a hot shot photographer and all his photographs, for lack of a better word, grace Time and Life and newspapers around the world. I just meant to convey that he was a hotshot freelance photographer. And he took a lot of shots, that took out all the beautiful 'copy' that the bloke

20:30 wrote about the tension. It was the first issue of 'Life Australia', and everybody was thrilled in the army, except me. I expected to be sacked for it. There was a photo of me, with my arm around Lorrae Desmond, and talked about how the soldiers drank a month's supply of beer in one afternoon. It neglected to say that it had been saved up. There was

21:00 a photo of my sergeant, Brady, who had won all the money from the soldiers gambling. It neglected to say it was American soldiers, on the night before they went out on patrol, where he had taken all their money. Not the little National Servicemen with mothers who rang….The fourth thing that could have ruined my career…Oh yes, the re-supply of water. It showed the helicopter re-supplying, when we always tried to be phantoms, and not show our presence. So I reckoned that my career was ended, but I got a very nice message from General Daly saying 'What a marvellous article.' So it just shows there is no such thing

21:30 as bad publicity. They were so excited that Life Australia used a company of a battalion in action as the first cover story.

Just in respect to Long Tan, where were you? Had you arrived in Vietnam?

No, no, no. I was still at Duntroon. That was in August, 1966. I didn't get there until October, November. 'B' Company

22:00 was sort of involved in it, in a sense. They were the first decoys through on the first one. Noel Ford, I don't think, was there…It was basically a 'D' Company action, with some 'A' Company and 'B' Company involvement, but basically it was just one company against a lot of people. Subsequently, I took a few of his…Harry Smith who was the company commander of 'D', I took a few of his guys, including one platoon commander, we were having

22:30 a bit of trouble, later in the year, I took them in under me. Harry unloaded them. And a couple of them did have trouble. A couple of them reckoned Bribie was as bad, if not worse, than Long Tan, so I sent a couple of guys home because they really had had enough. But they had the two big actions…of the battalion, almost of the war. Until the big fire support base things, later on, up in 'Coral' and 'Balmoral' [Fire Support Bases].

Just in respect to these few guys,

23:00 **what signs were they demonstrating to show that they were….**

Either depressed, or shakes, the classic shell shock, if you like. That was a term in World War 1. They were traumatised to an extent. They were fair dinkum. One was a lance corporal that I had a lot of time for. I just got them home early on some….I don't know whether I used medical or what, but they had enough. It sounds strange in a way, they're only there for a year. You think

23:30 of the guys who were there for four or five years, but other than people of the 'Burma Railway' and things…A year of operations of which six to nine months might be extreme tension, I've got in perspective now, where I was always a bit caustic of people saying they had such a terrible time in Vietnam. But I can appreciate the impact of tension on guys, particularly guys who were young

24:00 and not necessarily from a stable background, or home, or environment or something.

Bribie, can you share with me the

24:30 **leading up of events to what was happening there. The planning of the operation, then what happened?**

No planning. My planning was, that I was going to Saigon to catch up with a couple of British rugby characters that I played ruby with in Malaya. And I had my first time off after a couple of months to go up on a Friday afternoon to Saigon. I was booked on a one o'clock 'Wallaby Courier' from Nui Dat to Saigon. At about quarter past twelve, we were scrambled.

25:00 I was just getting ready to look like I look in that Bulletin article, with a slouch hat on and a shirt with a name on it, and we were scrambled. We were the second company on the 'fly in' and there was a pretty reasonable briefing that there had been major force. I don't whether the word 'ambush' was used. It wasn't because…at that stage there had been no contact. There had been a contact with the

25:30 ARVN troops the night before. It was thought that these people might be heading away, through what was known as the 'Long Green', which was an area close to 'Hoy My', about fifteen 'clicks' [kilometres] south east of Nui Dat. And so probably due south of Long Tan about five or ten kilometres.

26:00 'A' Company went in first and we were second company in, and as we were landing, my forward observer was with me, Captain Jim Ryan, an artillerymen, and he said, "There's bamboo burning over there." And I said, "No Jim, that's not bamboo. Somebody is shooting at us." The crack was there. And he was swinging his pack, as gunners tend to do, and being pretty casual. We'd made a fairly good move once we jumped off the chopper and headed in,

26:30 and subsequently there was a report that 'A' Company had had contact, and a fairly decent scrap and had pulled back. And then the battalion commander had a meeting with the O[orders] group around two thirty, and we were chosen to do the assault, and 'A' Company were going to support from where they were. And it was a pretty simple operation. 'C' Company were in armoured personnel carriers, but they hadn't got there. There was

27:00 something wrong with the timing. I think the carriers were late leaving Nui Dat. We had gone by helicopter, and we had beaten them. So we didn't have any APCs, but that wasn't a worry. I was told we were attacking a camp, so I put the company in…I don't think we actually had a white line for a start line, but I mused over this, and in a Bulletin article I quoted Sergeant Brady who was one of my

27:31 platoon commanders, with whom I shared a lively relationship, as I wrote to the Bulletin. He said to me later, "It was just like as though it was a normal thing that you did on a Friday afternoon…" He was really saying what a crazy thing it was that we attacked like this, without reconnaissance or a lot of information, and he said, "You just told them to line up and turn left at the start line, and then move forward." He said, "It was just like as though you would do that on a

28:00 Friday afternoon in Vietnam." He said, "When you said to fix bayonets, that just seemed pretty normal, too." Now this fellow was one of my harshest critics, and I had to put him on the dry, occasionally, and a few other things. But he was right. And I think he was conveying the fact that we were well trained, and even though this was a bit strange, in some ways, to be doing a company attack just out of nowhere….Theoretically called a battalion attack, because we had a company in support, we never really saw

28:30 too much of 'A' Company anyway. They were on our left somewhere in the bush. And we just moved forward. As we moved forward a guy was shot from above and behind, as we crossed the start line, in the reserve platoon. And I said for the medics to come. I told people not to leave. My orders were not quite carried out because he was taken back to the landing zone, but he

29:00 died on the landing zone anyway, but I thought we needed everybody that we could have right there then. But that's another story. I didn't know that that happened anyway, so it didn't affect my morale. But we moved forward and we struck pretty heavy fire, pretty soon. At one stage I told 'A' Company to stop firing on the left, and they said they weren't firing, so that told me that we had enemy on our left. I think what happened is I was pretty good at mathematics and at geometry, and what I did was attack

29:30 right up the centre of a dug-in new position, so that almost from when we took off, they were on our flanks. That's why we had fire from snipers, even behind us, and we went pretty well as far as we could go. Then one platoon bogged down a bit on the left, so I moved Brady's platoon through. Four Platoon, which was Sullivan's platoon. On our right

30:00 O' Hallaran, was really in amongst it. Then I went up pretty close to O'Halloran…Or he came and met me and I said, "Go thirty yards. And see if you clean it up." Because, remember, I am attacking a camp. The implication of tents and showers and things.

30:30 And further more, they hadn't run. They had resisted one company and then another. The artillery was coming in. So we got a call back from a bloke who was bloody magnificent, Kerry 'Mickey' Rooney, he was one of O'Halloran's lance corporals. He said, "There's a machine gun thirty yards, boss. I'll go sixty." We'll he died at the barrel of the machine gun, throwing grenades, and a

31:00 a fair bit of his section died with him, and the bad thing was, that whenever anybody moved to get someone, they got shot, too. So there was a total visual contact. Nobody could see anyone too much, but we knew they were there. I moved the artillery in, closer and closer, and we could hear the screams as they were being hit a bit. But some of it got a bit too close, and there were some more screams and they

were from us. But it was necessary, and the artillery blokes did a good job. At one stage there was a counter-attack

31:33 on the left flank between….And I put my artillery people, and that is how I got Jim Ryan an MID [Mention in Dispatches], and they resisted a counter attack against company headquarters on the left flank. In the meantime, Brady's mob hadn't got too far with their fixed bayonets charge, and bayonets are pretty useless in the Australian Army these days, or they were there then, because there weren't too many weapons that could take them. The old Lee Enfield rifle with a long bayonet could work. But most

32:00 of them had sub-machine guns or automatic weapons, and there were only about three bayonets per section. But anyway, it was important to fix them, to make people realise we were fair dinkum, I guess. And that's what I replied in my letter to the Bulletin about, a slight criticism of saying the bayonet was useless in modern warfare. Well, I said it was the tradition of the 'Nek' and elsewhere at Gallipoli, that you did it and it was an act of will. I think there was another bayonet charge in Vietnam, subsequent to that. But Sergeant Brady likes to say that we were the first and last

32:30 bayonet charge in Vietnam. And so it was a long hot afternoon. Hot, there were fires, then the APCs eventually arrived. Someone got the idea of using APCs. I have had the benefit of an audio tape since. What happened, the OC [Officer Commanding] of the administration company back at the base, sometime around about three o'clock decided, extraordinarily, he was a nice man, he wanted to get command of 'B' Company, he's dead, Bob Sinclair,

33:00 but he wanted to have command of a rifle company, but he was given 'admin' company instead, when I arrived. And somehow or the other, he decided that this would be a fairly momentous action, so he put a reel to reel tape on in the administration, called 'B Echelon', area, and there was a loud speaker….People in the base could have a loud speaker system, and they could move around and do their jobs, like having a speaker phone here. So,

33:30 he picked up stuff. The helicopters were taking off from there and the aircraft were taking off from there and the guns were firing from there, so the tapes sounds, when I eventually heard it years later, sounds like 'Apocalypse Now', it sounds real. It was real, of course. It's probably the one tape of a battalion action ever done, I think. Nobody else has ever heard of it. Two days after the operation, Bob said,

34:01 "I've got a tape of the command net." I said, "You've got what?" He said, "I've got a tape of the command net. Would you like it?" I said, "That's magnificent. Yes, I think I would." The fact that I didn't play it for about ten or fifteen years means I was probably reasonably traumatised about it. I may well have played it. I didn't have any facility to play it in Vietnam. I know that I played it one night, many years later, at the house in Woollahra, and I've probably played it two or three times since. But it is a very interesting tape

34:30 showing the actions, and it shows that I was offered support by the battalion commander, but we were just so closely engaged with the enemy, and it was such a tight little action, that I couldn't see how we could be replaced. So I wasn't playing heroics. I am at great pains to show, because the historians have been a bit unkind to the commanding officer, in saying, "Why did you…?" To make further unkindness apparent, the Task Force commander had said, unbeknownst to me, that we all

35:00 had to be back in camp at night because he thought there was going to be an attack. They had intelligence sources that said there was gong to be an attack on the Task Force that night. And that is how long Long Tan had started. The Viet Cong had mortared the Task Force, and when our people went out, supposedly in response to an ambush….There is a great debate, still, whether or not it was an ambush, or who attacked who. So unbeknownst to me, and until I heard the tape, I didn't know that the battalion, that Harry Smith was lining up 'D' Company and getting ready to get back on the choppers and go home,

35:31 while I'm still locked in a fire fight with the North Vietnamese. I wasn't too impressed in retrospect, but we never had any words about it. As the CO, he was under orders. And the historians have been very kind to me in the official history saying that I was put upon, and I didn't do too much complaining about it. But I really didn't know about it at the time. It was possibly mentioned in orders, but you don't take notice of those sort of things. When you're going into an action, you don't always care what is happening afterwards. But when five or six hours later you're still locked in mortal combat, and

36:00 people are trying to get the rest of your forces, which unfortunately weren't very much use to me….They couldn't help me except to send the APCs to me, when I said, "Can't you do something?" Or when they volunteered them, I think. But unfortunately there was so much smoke, from fires started by tracer, and by mortars and artillery, and even by normal rounds, tracer rounds, that I said, "Come to the smoke at some stage." And I thought it was such an easy operation for them.

36:30 You know, I knew where I was, why the hell didn't everyone else know? And there was a lot of noise going on anyway. So they came the wrong way and an RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] hit the vehicle and killed the driver, well, squashed the front in. It was just a high explosive round, it wasn't armour piercing. So I lost the first APC in Vietnam. A classmate of mine had taken command of the squadron that day. And I lost the first APC. We had to burn it,

37:00 when we left at some stage. But we retrieved it the next day. And as a result of that action, and I've just

been to a conference last year, which confirmed that after that action, people realised that we needed tanks in Vietnam, and eight months later tanks arrived in Vietnam, as a result of us trying to use APCs like tanks. As well, when the APCs did get to us, and we were loading the wounded up, there was another

37:30 recoil-less round hit the APC and wounded more guys. So the upshot was that about a third of my company were killed and wounded, and a few of the support were included. There was something like thirty five killed and wounded. And I got a doctor, who I'd never met, he was fantastic, he came in, his name was John Taskey…He was actually part of the Himalayan climbing expedition a few years ago, and opted not to the go the top.

38:00 Taskey was a great character, and he did a terrific job that afternoon with the wounded. And around about seven o'clock at night, so we started at probably three, getting dark about seven or eight, we regrouped and we had some blokes out on the battlefield, and I particularly said, "Are they dead?" And I was assured they were dead, and they all were, except one. The next

38:30 morning when we cleared through the area, Lance Corporal Vic Otway was there, not at all cranky at us. He had a bullet through one leg, and he was about two feet from the machine gun barrel, so he wasn't going to be talking to anyone when they asked him whether he was alive or not. Then we hit the place with Napalm [chemical burning agent] and rockets and eight inch artillery and the whole bit, that night, and he got one more bit of shrapnel through the other leg.

39:02 That shows you how relatively useless artillery or bombardments are in jungle, but that is an aside from an Infantryman. And Vic also said, when the North Vietnamese were moving out, he got up, that would be him, he got up and tried to write a couple off, but his weapon jammed. It was full of muck and rubbish. He had an Armalite. So that saved his life, too. He wouldn't have done too much damage at that stage, I suspect. But they found him the next morning,

39:30 and I was off out chasing the fleeing North Vietnamese. There were talk of many hundreds of graves, we only ended up with seven bodies. They dragged their bodies away, as in their religion. The newspaper headlines say we killed eighty or something, but that was the Task Force deciding what the numbers were. But I've not got any evidence. They were North Vietnamese. The mayor of the local fishing village laid the bodies out in the square. They were all big coal miners, from

40:00 North Vietnam. They weren't local VC. And they did that as a deterrence to show the locals not to succumb to the pressure. So all in all, it was a pretty long day, and a long night, and the blokes performed magnificently. They did everything they were asked to do and more. Some great individual heroism. A lot of them decorated. It's the most decorated platoon, Five Platoon, the most decorated platoon in the Vietnam War.

40:31 But there were a lot of empty beds in camp, and there was no feeling of exaltation, it was just a weariness. But then again, we were out on the track and the lead company run into the next month, loose another couple of guys. Between Harry Smith and I, we had a lot of the casualties…We just kept running into enemy, and we were good. But we lost lives. All war is

41:00 pretty bloody awful, and that is the theme of my letter to the Bulletin, which won me the letter prize of the week, where I said the awful truth of Operation Bribie was that the North Vietnamese and us belted the hell out of each other that afternoon, and nobody won. But that's the awful truth.

We'll just pause there.

Tape 8

00:50 **During that action, particularly during that action where it was so confusing, and there were so many things going on,**

01:00 **is there any moments that you can point to of great bravery or courage, that you can highlight?**

Yes, certainly in 5 Platoon and the citations say it all. Yes, certainly there were great acts of heroism by individual soldiers and the platoon commander held them together well, the National Servicemen. The whole thing was bloody brave. Rooney…You can only get two

01:30 things when you're dead. Either a VC or a mention in dispatches, one end or the other end of the medal spectrum. And it's very hard to get a VC for someone in an action like that. Usually defeats can produce….Momentous defeats or momentous victories. This was a rugged draw. So yes, Rooney's action was extraordinary. I wrote to his fiancée…He had been very strong three days earlier.

02:01 He had come to a track junction and two guys jumped him and he killed them both. He had done a very good week in Vietnam, which in other circumstances would have earned him a Victoria Cross. But I wrote him up. And when you write citations you don't say what they're for. So I was hoping he would get a Victoria Cross. I knew he wouldn't. Two men, there's the medics. Dick Odendahl, he got a

02:30 Military Medal out of it. Spike Jones, a corporal who subsequently became a warrant officer class one, Military Medal. But there was heroism for all sorts of guys, machine gunner guys, and so….It's interesting how it affects people. At one stage, I was standing to

03:00 get a better view of things, and suddenly from my right, under a clump of bushes, a voice sounds, "Get down you f-ing idiot." The voice looked around and it was Sergeant Brady talking to me, and then he realised it was me, and he looked at me, and at that stage a machine gun burst came straight down the centre, kicking up the sand a bit like Gallipoli heroics film, between Brady and myself. Brady was very sensibly

03:30 undercover. He had been shot in the bum on Operation Hobart. He knew it hurt. And he was well and truly down undercover. I was standing up, trying to control the battle in a sense, or see what I could see. I had a couple of operators down low, there, beside me. I stopped talking, let go of the pressel switch, and he realised it was me. He shook his head, like that, as though I was a hopeless case anyway. What was I doing? Was it bravado or not? But

04:00 I never had any trouble with him again after that. He had been on the dry and a few things, and it was a moment in time when we communicated, and he had quite correctly tried to get this stupid soldier down. Then he realised it was me, and I was doing my job and he was doing his job. That was just another moment in time, between a couple of characters. I had originally said that I shared a lively relationship with him, to the editor of the Bulletin. She rang me and said

04:30 what did I mean by that, with a question mark after it. I said he was pain in the arse. She said, "Can I print that?" I said, "No." She listened to 'embargoes', not like some people. But Brady was a good sergeant. I believe he's living in Tasmania or somewhere. He hasn't responded to my letter to the Bulletin, so he's not reading the press these days. But, there's nothing wrong with having a sergeant commanding a platoon, we just were short

05:00 of officers. One had gone to a support company, and sometimes a sergeant is better in some case. O'Halloran had a very good sergeant, McCulloch, he was wounded. He was very good, too, he was a good old hand. Four Platoon command had a very good sergeant, Henry, Chisholm, he was excellent, too. So all in their own way, they all contributed to it. It was marvellous team work. One 'mob' on the right flank copped the brunt, and might have felt, by virtue of the casualties,

05:30 that they didn't quite get as much help as they could have from the others. But, you know, it's not an exact science, the position of weapons and who can tell who should be getting up and running at some stage. I had a feel of control on the battlefield, as much as was possible. It was pretty tough. People tell me the smoke was tremendous, I don't remember it. I'm pretty

06:00 good at remembering the detail. I gave an address at a Bribie ceremony, thirty years on from it, and A company commander said, "I don't know how Mackay ever remembers anything." I didn't have time to take notes. I just happened to have a pretty good photographic memory of some of the things. But I know, in others, I was either deaf and traumatised or numb from the events, and so not quite so precise about it. But the basics, I'm pretty clear.

It is an inexact science. And

06:30 **it's called a 'Fog of War' when you're in there and it's all going on…**

It's a very good term. First of all you can't hear a bloody thing. And there's so much noise. And everything has to be shouted and repeated. Add to that all the small arms fire and grenades and rocket launchers and the smoke, which was obviously around. And the vegetation was…And

07:00 very shattered vegetation, too, as a result of artillery. So visibility is disturbed. It's almost worse. Although some of the trees are down, it's disturbed the lines of sight. It's hard to pick things out. The 'Fog of War' is a marvellous term that was coined, I believe, hundreds of years ago, probably. In essence it means you can't be sure that your commands are heard. That's why in wireless, you have people acknowledge terms.

07:32 'Roger' means message received. And, 'Wilco', that means, "I've understood what you've said." Now, that's all very well, but half the time we were shouting commands. Whilst the radios were working fairly competently, sometimes the radio operator is not with the platoon commander. He's thirty yards from me, so it's better to shout through a section commander.

08:00 In retrospect I think the actions were just superb, calm, measured, controlled. Now when blokes throats are being cut by shrapnel and there is blood everywhere, it's not exactly going to be measured. But as an overall assessment, I've had to have my wits about me to write that letter to the Bulletin, a few months ago.

08:30 And I had no hesitation in saying it was just calm, steadfast, courage under fire. And it was very nice to be able to say that and think that.

Was there a moment where you almost lost control. You say your job was to keep everything together…

Frankly no, which is probably surprising. I don't think anybody has ever asked me that question. But no.

09:02 The film goes grainy for me in crisis. It all goes in slow motion and it's a pretty lucky characteristic. I think for some people that it speeds up. To me, it gets all very slow motion. I can see the bullets now between Brady and myself. That is how it seems to me, all the time. It means that I'm not rushing around like a 'headless WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK '.

09:30 It seems that I can digest it and absorb it, and then act as though it is a measured thing. That is my feeling, and I guess the people around me are the best judge of that.

Obviously you don't remember everything exactly, but as you said you have a pretty good memory of images. Apart from the shots that came between you and Brady, are there any other images from that encounter

10:00 **that will be forever etched in your mind?**

There was a sniper in a tree, and we tried to get onto him. Just as I was onto him and hoping that my weapon wouldn't jam, a mortar round hit the tree and blew him apart, and also parts of his weapon came down near my feet. I remember that, once again, in slow motion. The twisted,

10:30 devastated trees around the area….It's terrible to remember the trees rather than bodies, is a memory of mine, of a little hell hole place. One of sort of relief when we eventually regrouped…But at no stage was I

11:00 ever thinking of the fact that we are going to get done. It was just press on. And I think the history says that. I had been taught to press on, and maybe history says that is not the right thing to do, but it was at the time, or it seemed to be at the time. And nobody queried it. And that's pretty good in the crazy tradition of military attacks, if you like. But, then,

11:30 if you accept that war is bloody awful, and if you do it, progress as much as you can…Within some sort of reason. The reason comes in when you actually stop advancing because you can't go any further without dying. So some reason enters the equation. I was offered help, but at no stage did I ask for help, because there was nowhere you could fit anybody in.

12:00 We were in our right distances, we were in our right parameters. And for any company to have moved through us, they would have been killed moving through us, so we would have had to pull back. Now the territory itself wasn't vital. History…The examination of intelligence documents shows that they were covering, once again, a major headquarters. That's why they stood and fought, they weren't there to ambush us. They were actually covering the headquarters. We ran into two of these situations

12:30 in one month. In a Third World Bookshop in Sydney, not so many years after this, I was pursuing my Marxist Leninist studies as part of an ANU political sciences thing, and I had to walk into this Third World Bookshop, dressed in uniform, and I know that that bookshop was under surveillance and I even waved to what I thought would be where operatives would

13:00 be sitting, watching whoever entered the bookshop. I was in uniform buying this Marxist Leninist thing where it was much cheaper than it was at ANU in Canberra, and I came across a document that I have here that shows, and I have it here….And it was the North Vietnamese version of the Summer Offensive, and it told how they destroyed a hundred tanks of the Australians on the afternoon of the 17th of February near Hoi My, and killed about…I think they only killed about thirty five, I think they said, but

13:30 it was terrible propaganda. It was worse than our newspapers claiming things…But the irony of it, reading it there, still in uniform, and studying the doctrine of these people that we had been up against. And there's this book, this marvellous book, on the Summer Offensive….And I idly flipped it over, and I looked at it, and suddenly there's my action sitting there, printed in Hanoi and distributed in the Third World Bookshop in Sydney. Quite a spooky feeling.

14:01 I had it and I photocopied pages, and somebody has made reference to it…I think they even used that in the official history.

We've dealt with the role of artillery support in this?

I've covered it, and I've talked about how it was pretty difficult at times. The forward observer, he was very good. He was close by me, most of the time, and we moved the guns into fifty, and then to twenty five metres, which is getting pretty close. The trouble is trees tend to ruin the burst,

14:30 so there is no doubt there were some own casualties from on of the last rounds. And obviously some of the Diggers weren't too happy about that. Unbeknownst to me, a couple have written books and it was quoted in the history as saying that the guns were hopeless. But it was a very difficult task. And I mean, you are damned if you do, and you are damned if you don't. We had to bring it in close. Ideally you want

15:00 gunfire in enfilade, not coming over the top of you. But we couldn't decide which direction the enemy were in, we couldn't determine which…We couldn't force the outcome, I mean, of that, so we had to bring the guns in from one place, and we brought them in and it was almost overhead fire. But it was marvellous, the ranging of the guns, and there was a small number of casualties of ours. There were plenty of theirs.

When did you become aware of the full scale of casualties?

15:35 Well, I thought you were going to ask what was the full scale of what we were up against, and that is an interesting question….

Did you have any idea of what you were up against?

I guess that I was just doing the job, you get pretty focused, and the wider picture, you've got to deal with the job in hand

16:00 and it was pretty demanding. I knew it was tough, but I knew that they would crack, because that's what they'd always done. But they didn't crack. And they were very good fighters. And there was a great respect on the battlefield between 6RAR and the North Vietnamese troops at Long Tan. And so that's the first part of the question. I just kept going because….My background and training taught me

16:30 not to underestimate the enemy by any means. Not to talk of…People used to talk of funny little Japanese who can't see and can't do anything, so they ride their bicycles down and take Malaya in two weeks. I was very cognisant of the ability of North Vietnamese people to fight, but I thought we had overwhelming odds. And in the region, we probably did have at least parity, but they weren't employed. It was only me that was employed. 'A' Company were providing fire support, but I don't think they were able to do

17:00 too much because we cut out their fire from when we advanced…

Even to this day, do you know how many people you were up against?

Well, yes, we've fairly defined, there's a little doubt about it, but anything up to a battalion, but of crack troops. And we're a company attacking a battalion. There was a regional force, D445, but there was also a North Vietnamese force. So there's much debate still

17:30 about it all, interestingly, thirty five years on. But we're pretty sure they were elements of 274 or 275 [Battalions North Vietnam]. And they found a lot of bodies in graves, up the road about five kilometres or so, in the ensuing weeks and months, and many of them were freshly dug graves. That was the major action at the time, so we're assuming that the identification is correct in many of them. And the local battalion was D445, they were there, too, but that was like the sort of the

18:00 scouts and the whole bit. They were our normal foe. They were almost our 'friendly foe'.

When did you realise that your casualties….

I guess I was aware of them all the time. Of course, it was all pretty close in. But as for realising that a third of the company were killed and wounded, that only comes to you in the night, or the next, morning,

18:30 when you do that totting up. But once again, I wasn't going to replace them. I had fresh troops, in a sense, in reserve, that I moved through a platoon. The casualties were mainly in two out of the three platoons. It wasn't that I was short of manpower, it was just that these people were in dug-in positions, and very good, and we were right in the middle of their field of fire. They may well have been there for many days,

19:00 making certain they were in a correct position. I think it was more like a staging post. I was actually surveying that position from the air the next month when the chopper was hit. That's where the thirty 'cal' [calibre of machine gun rounds] came from…That was coming back from viewing the boats, and that's what made us think that this is a well established position that they kept using, every now and again. The only time there was a big attack was when we jumped them, because we came out very quickly,

19:30 from their attack the previous night. We came out quickly, still many hours, because we didn't land until about one or two. I don't think they expected us to be as quick as that. Unfortunately they had a dug-in position and we didn't. Your normal estimate is to attack a dug-in position, you really need a superiority of two or three to one. Well, at best, with the people in our field of fire, we were one to one. And in fact, there were more people behind them, and they weren't apparently able to be committed, or

20:00 they were covering. So it was just one of those incredible Friday afternoons in Vietnam, where you are in the right place at the right time, or the wrong place at the wrong time. Whichever way you like to look at it. But that's war, and that's part of an ongoing process that saw us put them on the back foot in a number of other areas, across a period of a few months, in the strategy of the overall battle. We then come to another subject which is outside my scope really. Minefields, and the problems that that created.

20:37 **Just some of the issues that came out of that, and the overall strategy of fighting the war in Vietnam. There is no front line. You are fighting battles to take positions, which are then taken over again by your enemy. How demoralising is that kind of war?**

Yes, when people come back to empty beds and say, "What is the point?" That is what one of the soldiers has written in one of his books. And saying, "Did we really know what we were

21:00 up against?" And, "Did the company commander…." One bloke, 'Snowy' Gannon, I'm yet to get him,

"Did the company commander really know what was happening?" Which is quoted in something, and I, unfortunately didn't take it up. I got Snowy decorated even, too. I'll get him. "What's the point of it?" Of course, where it's not a terrain

21:31 thing, you are still talking about the ascendancy over population. Even, you can say, the 'battle for hearts and minds' shows that you can keep these people away from your population. Lay their bodies out in the marketplace, and show that, "We are doing something to protect you. So that you can get to market. So that you can live and practise your religion." That's the justification, but it can wear a bit thin after forty years.

22:02 I'm a thinking soldier, and I never would have put those men's lives at risk, if I could have avoided it. But in the situation, the dynamics of the situation, at that stage, we were hot to trot to get them. The textbook study would have been, yes, they would have moved or run, we would have followed up, we would have possibly caught up with their main force, they blocked us very effectively and fought as though it was bloody important to them to not give up

22:30 a yard of territory. So therefore, there had to be something behind them to do that. It was so contrary to the normal things. They weren't just there to give us a bloody nose, or have a go at us, so it's pretty interesting that they had a plan, and they needed to carry out their role, which they did. We needed to dislodge them. We needed to get them. They had already carried out a hit and run thing on the ARVN the night before. So, it was just part of the dynamics of

23:00 the method of operating.

How important is 'body count' in a war like that?

Well, the Americans instituted it, I suppose. A colleague of mine wrote a book called, 'Count Your Dead', John Rowe, which was about the 173rd Airborne [Parachute brigade], I think he was with them, at first. Certainly the newspapers find it important, and it is important in the sense that I am being quite open that we had seven or eight bodies….

23:31 We know that they were dragging people away and there were marks…I didn't even go through the area the next day. I was off chasing them. And I am a bit sad that I didn't. It wasn't my decision, but I would have liked to have….I have subsequently been back there. But we almost certainly killed fifty or sixty, maybe, of them. And that really

24:00 isn't important, except that it is almost a sporting idea of it, too. Who won and who lost? And that's important to the Diggers, in a sense, too. In the overall sequence it doesn't matter, except when you're in the thousands. Like the Tet Offensive. I mean, I saw five thousand bodies on one airfield before the Tet Offensive, in the North, and I can remember thinking 'What is this about?' And it was about….They got a few flagpoles, and that's what they were after. The symbols. And that's

24:30 why the Tet Offensive was such a magnificent public relations victory, helped by the American press, to eventually end the Vietnamese War, on their terms. Not ours. Body count wasn't important to them, they had plenty, and they didn't publicise their casualties. They told lies, just like our papers told lies about casualties. So it's not important to me, but I would have liked the Diggers to have seen evidence

25:00 that their struggles weren't in vain. They know that they weren't, because they were there, they could hear it. It's a complex question, but one that is now very relevant to the statistical games of the last few years.

The effect of that on the troops. You mentioned the empty beds. How long does that sort of shock of an engagement like that last

25:30 **in a company?**

It lasts forever in a sense. But they are also good at getting on with it. The empty beds was interestingly this Gannon's comment, who came to me. The effect on the soldiers? There is one very interesting tale. A lance corporal, a National Serviceman, I was promoting a lot of National Servicemen. They'd only been eighteen months in the army, but they were marvellously talented. I talked to you this morning about my regard for youth. This fellow was a little guy,

26:00 and he was a lance corporal. I was without a CSM, not on Bribie, but on a number of things. And he was there at the headquarters, on that day. And he was the sort of fellow that I thought would have been a casino operator, after Vietnam, and a few other things. A real little con man. Good guy, but just walked a fine line. Thirty years on, or even twenty years on, at some reunion in Brisbane,

26:30 he came up to me and said, "You know, I haven't held down a job in the last ten or fifteen years." He said, "I really can't handle it." It wasn't explicit, but I thought 'You know, that really has shattered him,' and he wasn't coping at all. And it was Bribie that did that to him, and that made me realise….Because I'm very careful

27:00 of the image of 'malingering Digger', and the psychotic illnesses and things. And I've got friends who talk of it, and there are some evidences of it of the sort of the strictly RSL [Returned and Services League] type, that is out for every benefit. That is an image, but mostly people are caring and worrying about our Diggers. But that reminded just

27:30 how serious this is. And I was trying to relate it, because I've always been wary of saying, "One year in Vietnam, God. Compare it to those World War 11 guys or World War 1." But you will find that one year in Vietnam almost certainly could be as hazardous as almost anything, other than the most extreme situations, such as 'Tobruk' and the 'Burma Railway'. And that to me is something that has grown on me over the years. And the more I see it…I maintain that it didn't affect me too much, but

28:01 I know that it has. The fact that I didn't talk about it for twenty or so years. 1987…

What about the short term affects? How did you get over the stress of patrols and the stress of engagements, in the company? What did the men do?

Relaxation, and beer, of course. A bit of gambling, a bit of.…Yes.

28:30 Good morale in the platoons and in the company and in the battalion.…A little story. A couple of weeks after Bribie, I found the Catholic padre, who was a good friend of mine, Monsignor Harley, I said, "I would like to have a service for the guys. As soon as you can. A simple one." We were somewhere. We were

29:01 in a creek bed somewhere. I don't know how I got the padre out there, but we must not have been too far out. Anyway, we had a service, and the Vietnamese interpreters were there, the only Vietnamese. And it was a simple service and he was a great guy.…The next day, or the next few days, I noticed the service improved dramatically from the interpreters. They were pretty idle and pretty chattery and things. At one stage I said, "You guys are actually doing a day's work." He said, "Oh, sir, we didn't realise you were a Catholic, until

29:30 that service." I ruined it all. I said, "I'm not a Catholic." I said, "It's just that Father Harley is the best padre in the army." I said, "And I've told him he has to bury me, too." And with that their faces fell, and they went back to their usual level of sub-standard service. It was the stupidest thing I could have done. A little story that illustrates the difficulties and the cultural complexities and the whole bit.

Turning to faith? Is that

30:00 **something that you might have done?**

There's a saying, 'There are no atheists in foxholes'. And I actually think that is a pretty true statement. I use that on people when they start saying they know there is no God. You could say there are no agnostics in foxholes, but I think it is better to say there are no atheists in foxholes. To me, my observation is that it's pretty true.

30:31 When people face.….You know I've faced death experiences maybe three or four times in my life, at least. Either medical or otherwise. I find that the simple faith…And I think that even the most cynical of soldiers is wary of being too sure about there being nothing out there. And that's an observation based on thirty something years ago. I haven't honed

31:00 that much since, one way or another, in an analysis of the population. I know what my ideas and beliefs are.

What about R & R? [Rest and Recuperation] The troops went down to Vung Tau, what did the officers do?

I went to the temples of Angkor. That was when the battalion went home. I think I told you I was an 'Indo-China-phile',

31:30 and I managed to get across to Western Cambodia, which was very interesting.

Were you allowed in Cambodia, in uniform?

Well, it was interesting. I don't think I went in uniform, but it was very interesting. I did get approval from Foreign Affairs. I only got it about four hours before I took off, but I flew with one of these Englishmen from Saigon. An original 'rugby Singapore' mate.

32:02 I took him, he was going back to Singapore, so I took him to broaden his.…And I did broaden his cultural ideas, for a few days, because he was a typical sort of 'Sahib' type, but then he ran off with one of the temple 'rubbing girls' for the last couple of days, so I don't know that he got too much culture. One of the ladies rubbing the temple rubbings, for sale, that's what I mean. You're very clever interviewers because I keep

32:30 thinking that I'm just talking to you, and not to the world. I got Foreign Affairs approval, somehow, and I guess I didn't go Air Phung [?]. But I flew Air Vietnam to Phnom Penh and got a DC3 up to Siem Reap and had a marvellous time. And went back there again, recently.…That is not typical, incidentally.

33:01 The officers did go to Vung Tau and did go to Hong Kong. And they, stupidly, brought in R & R, you could go home to Australia.

You never did that?

No, I think it came after I went. But the wives say to the husbands, "Why don't you come home?" And

what does he do? He comes home to a house full of crying children or people who are saying, “We miss you, terribly.” It’s just better to go and vaporise for a few days, I suspect.

33:30 But once that came in, it was almost that people felt the compulsion to come home. My wife probably wouldn’t agree with that comment at all. But I think it’s true. My observation was that people thought they better go home, or someone would say, “Why aren’t you going home?” A lot of the Diggers just wanted to go and let off steam somewhere, and home wasn’t necessarily the place to go and do it.

Even if you did go to Vung Tau, though, it wouldn’t have been wise for you, in your role, within the

34:00 **company, to blow off steam with the Diggers?**

No.…Well, I think we almost did have some time when we just went and bivouacked.…No, I don’t think that’s right. Not there. It’s more like exercises around Australia. But there wasn’t too much of a problem, I think. Certainly in Vung Tau, officers would drink in the same bar as a soldiers. I mean, there was

34:30 no problem in our army with that. But of course, it’s not very wise at midnight if the soldiers have had too much to drink or the officer has. But I don’t think there was too much of a problem about that. There wasn’t that much out there, anywhere. It was pretty simple and fundamental, Vung Tau. ‘Grog and girls’. And they were both pretty dangerous.

Did you have any problems in your own company with either?

Yes.

35:00 **Did you as a company commander have to deal with them? Or did you turn a blind eye?**

Yes, I had to in one case, with an officer, yes. But that was the luck of the draw. It didn’t stop him. I just had to discipline him, that’s all.

What happened?

He broke out, with another young officer somewhere. And I found out, so I had to.…

35:35 They were only away a night. That is no big problem, unless there is a residual problem. But I’m not really willing to discuss the details of it, other than that, yes, it happened, and it was a problem.

36:00 Because women and disease and grog are a problem in Asia for young soldiers, and young officers, and officers, full stop. Let’s not be too genteel.

The Americans, in particular, had an added problem with drugs. Was there ever any encounters with that in your time in Vietnam?

Not in the 6th Battalion. In retrospect, I think there might have been some minor stuff.

36:30 There certainly was later on, in Vietnam. Once again, if you’re not flat out.…If you’re flat-out, there’s no time for nonsense. I do believe there was later on, but that’s hearsay. So my evidence is not worth much. But, I would say, almost none, or none. Certainly none to my direct knowledge. The 6th was pretty busy, with high morale, a fighting battalion. A good CO and a good RSM.

37:03 **When the 6th went home, your new role was with Field Force Victor. Can you just briefly explain how and what that was all about?**

I think officially, I was.…In the ‘G2 section’, as a major.…as an operator in…I think it’s in operations, I’m vague. There’s ‘G2’ and ‘G3’. We use different acronyms or abbreviations to the Americans,

37:30 but I can’t imagine I was in the intelligence groups so I must have been in the operations group. I didn’t find it terribly stimulating. I found that paralysis by analysis was pretty rife. There was an overload of information. There was an overload of intelligence. And I was concerned about that. My unofficial and more important role was as liaison officer for Brigadier Graham and then Brigadier Hughes, the two Task Force commanders whilst I was there.

38:00 And I was able to communicate with General Weyand directly, on some of that, because it was a fairly difficult time. The Task Force commander, Brigadier Graham, was not a happy man with the Americans. This has been documented recently well, so I feel comfortable talking about it. He died recently. He was a very fine soldier and a man of a very firm conviction. He wasn’t too impressed with the Yanks… General Fred Weyand was one of the finest officers I’ve ever met

38:33 He was a three star general, the corps commander. He had been in command of the 25th Division. And he got to four stars as the commander of army, subsequently. A very fine man, and pretty cognisant of Australian capabilities. But we were very keen to do our own thing and particularly in Brigadier Graham’s time we weren’t taking too much notice of the Americans telling us to do anything.

39:00 **What was the basis of those particular tensions that he had?**

The Australian way of things was regarded as being superior. And in terms of local operations it was.

But we were part of a joint force. So, I felt that we possibly could have been able to co-operate a bit more.

39:30 But we didn't like the way they did their 'search and destroy' missions…Not so much from a moral point of view, but from a plain horse sense point of view. And the more I saw of American officers in the headquarters, who were going out to command battalions, the more I felt that…We trained up and we had people going for ages, with the battalions beforehand, and really integrating,

40:00 and they just threw people into things for six month stints, where they had to make their way and make their name.…Their moment of glory, for lack of a better word.

We're out of tape.

Tape 9

00:50 **Where were you and when did you receive new orders of going to Quetta?**

I was in the field somewhere.

01:00 I think I've told you about the sergeant coming up to tell me about it. I was in action. I was somewhere in the bush up North, with an American group. I actually did have some work with Special Forces there. It was pretty interesting stuff. But they had all the

01:30 mercenaries working with them, and I managed to get some contact with them through an American operator, so I did do some of that work, whilst I was at Long Binh. It can't have been too far away because he was from the headquarters. Well, nowhere was too far away, anyway. The Cambodian border was

02:00 probably only twenty five 'clicks' away from Long Binh. A pretty narrow country, Vietnam. I was somewhere up in that area, and I think I had been working with some mercenaries, and I had a captain who had a bit of a problem with authorities, and we had to go in and distribute a million dollars and get some more of these workers, as a result of a night where he played up, and I had been

02:30 involved with him. It was actually my birthday. There you go, that's August, 1967. They were celebrating my birthday with ceremonies that were suggesting what I should be doing if I was in…These tribesmen suggesting what I would be doing if I was in Saigon, rather than out on the mountains. From there on, progressed to a night somewhere back at Long Binh, and the captain who was supposed to go back to the US ended up being sent back in to recruit some more mercenaries, for punishment.

03:04 So that was a role at Long Binh. I had a sort of 'ex officio' extra role, I seemed to be good at that. So that was when I got the news of Quetta…

While we're on the subject of Special Forces and mercenaries. What can you tell me about that, specifically?

Not really a lot, genuinely. They obviously did exist and they were used

03:30 on special operations, and some of them were covert type operations, but mostly they were just bloody good fighters, that the Australians used, the Montagnards. And I did have experiences with the Montagnards, the mountain men of Vietnam. Marvellous characters. And I was able to communicate with them a bit with schoolboy French and the Malayan language. It's interesting. If there is a lingua franca in Asia, and there isn't, but if there was one, it is the root Malay language.

04:00 The proto-Malays, and their migration through Asia, were the Malays originally and there are traces of the language. And I was able to make myself known amongst Montagnards, with a combination of French and Malay. Sometimes inefficiently. The 'Nungs' [ethnic Chinese] were marvellous fighters, and there were Laotians and Cambodian mercenaries, and the Americans used them extensively. And the Australians did in special action programs, but most of them were covert,

04:30 and I wasn't party to them. I wasn't working in that area, officially. I was just aware of them.

Just so I get a correct understanding of the mercenaries, they were Vietnamese people, they were foreigners from the French Foreign Legion?

No, no. They were very much tribesmen. The 'Montagnards' is a generic term for the mountain tribes…I think that's a French word, possibly. And the 'Nungs' are a tribe of Chinese from

05:00 Cambodia border regions. The Nungs and a couple of other unpronounceable names that were used by the Americans and used in covert actions, and very good fighters. It's selling the Ghurkhas short to call them that. The Ghurkhas were mercenaries for the Brits, but they were really well trained soldiers. These men were just marvellous killers, and jungle men.

So you've received news of the new orders coming through.

05:30 **Just tell me about coming back to Australia, arriving back….**

I actually arrived on a Qantas charter, I think. Landed at Mascot, obviously out of Saigon. I don't really remember those last few days. I do remember landing at Mascot and the plane bounced, and everybody cheered, and as we pulled up the terminal, somebody said, "We're home. Look, there's a big fat Commonwealth copper, sitting

06:00 there with a great gut." And everybody roared laughing. That was probably in late November. I said Harold Holt disappeared sometime in December, I think, at Portsea. I had an investigation with the disappearance of Noel Ford, but obviously that wouldn't have surfaced to January, because he didn't disappear until New Year's Eve, so I just sort of picked up the family in Canberra. They were living in Duntroon. My wife and

06:30 four-year-old daughter. We then went down to Sydney for a few days, where I did attend a court of inquiry, on route to the airport, to fly to Karachi, via probably Singapore. Then a Pakistan Airlines flight from Karachi to Quetta, where I first had a cultural…I had spent a lot of time in Asia, but the lady in the seat on the plane next to me, which was a 'Fokker Friendship', I think,

07:00 managed to eat her meal of omelette by putting it in her shawl. And I remember thinking 'Yes, this is a different country again.' She ate it out of her shawl, not from the plate. She probably thought her shawl was cleaner than the plate. So I arrived at this desert at six thousand feet, Quetta. An old military installation, founded by Kitchener.

07:32 And it was also the site of an earthquake in 1935, which killed thirty thousand people in thirty seconds. But I lived in Quetta for a year and I couldn't work out how thirty thousand people would have died in thirty seconds, because there is no building over about three stories, and they're all made of mud. But somehow or other, they did. They died in that earthquake. It's also famous for aircraftsman 'Ross', also known as Lawrence of Arabia. He was there hiding as a RAF [Royal Air Force] leading aircraftsman in 1929,

08:00 working out of the Quetta airbase, it was an RAF airbase. A marvellous old stone building, the college. Part of the sort of Raj, originally, the British Indian Army Staff College. Every general from Australia in World War 11 was a Quetta graduate, I'm pretty sure. Blamey was the first. The college was founded in 1908….Blamey went there pretty early, so he must have been pretty old by the time World War 11 finished.

08:32 On the board there were five field marshals. At one stage, either on the staff or on the course at the same time. A host of magnificent British characters. The Pakistanis carried on the Raj tradition pretty well. It was almost morning tea and afternoon tea, with the little finger raised, to some extent.

09:00 There was an element of that. Very interesting year. I fled to Afghanistan as much as possible, with this British officer…He was sort of a soul mate of mine. So the year is 1968. The riots are starting in Quetta that led to the overthrow of Ayub Khan. We went to Kandahar,

09:30 which was just across the border to us, then up the four lane highway that the Americans obligingly built, so that the Russians could invade through from the North. The Russians built the four lane highway south to Kabul, then the Americans built a four lane highway north from Kandahar to Kabul. So when the Russians invaded, they just drove the tanks straight down this beautiful highway that was only used by donkeys and ox carts before the Russians arrived.

10:03 Marvellous experiences in Afghanistan. I met the Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud, who was almost in hiding at that stage. I didn't know why, but subsequently the Russians assassinated him. I had a book signed by him, and I only yesterday, in a discussion with Christopher Kremmer, realised the significance of that book, probably, because he was a visionary and he was a very good man. A very progressive prime minister. Kabul was

10:30 a magnificent modern city. Pakistan was like the Taliban, if you like. I mean, the Taliban was inspired by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and Pakistan intelligence services anyway. Pakistan was hooded and shrouded and 'burkha'd and purdahed'[burkha is the long head covering/cloak to protect women from view and purdah is the state of women being isolated from men]and Kabul in Afghanistan was a bright, happy, free twentieth century port for Russian goods, and for every form of stolen item from all around the world.

11:00 Afghanistan is….not a crucible….Afghanistan is a crux of all the invasions of the world. Ghengis Khan and everybody has come through Afghanistan. Hitler and Tojo were going to meet in Afghanistan when they were ruling the world. It is a fulcrum for all the invasions. It just happens to be the geography that leads through. Magnificent country. The Oxus River,[Amu Darya, the River of Blood] and I managed to visit it

11:30 and film it, film the Russian concrete blockhouses on the other side. It was the height of the Cold War at this stage, 1968. And I subsequently went to Moscow on the way home. Yeah, fascinating.

Why did you go to Quetta?

The old British and Indian Army Staff College, and the sort of top students from any one year

12:00 are selected to do an overseas staff college. So two students go to Camberley in England, one to India, one to Pakistan, one to Canada, two to America. So this is about the seven or eight of the top candidates for staff college and presumably future generals go to overseas staff colleges. And that's why all the generals from World War 11 had been to Quetta

12:30 in the 1930s, to be prepared…In fact, the curriculum was about donkey loads and all sorts of things. In many ways, it was a little bit primitive, but a marvellous experience. Americans, Brits, Canadians, Arabs, Jordanians, Iraqis, Iranians, a marvellous melting pot. Once again, I seemed to get into these crucibles of different cultures and it was fascinating.

13:00 One of the characters who was part of it went back to be defence minister with Saddam [Hussein], into Iraq. Saddam was junior to him, and this bloke became a general. He left the course as a lieutenant colonel and became a general and minister of defence in Iraq. At that stage, the Americans were supporting Iraq. Interesting.

Were they teaching a type of warfare?

Yeah. It was a year long course. The courses of the Commonwealth

13:30 staff colleges…I wouldn't say they're synchronised, but much would be common between what was taught at our staff college at Queenscliff, in Victoria, and at Camberley. Half to three quarters of the content would be the same as in the Pakistani staff college. There were no Australian instructors there. I'm not sure there have ever been. I think there were some foreign instructors, but I have to think about that. Maybe not.

14:00 But in most staff colleges there are exchange officers, as well, from these countries on the staff. In fact, there wasn't in Pakistan. It shows the insularity of Pakistan, I suppose, in a sense, because I would think every other staff college would have a foreign directing staff on the body of the students as well, in the country. So while there were many things peculiar to it, I gained a lot from it, because I learnt about

14:30 the Indian sub-continent. And I learnt a lot about Asia, and I learnt a lot about Pakistan, which hasn't been of any great direct value to me, except for understanding Islam. It is the only state based on a religion, in the world. A lot of people think Israel is, it's not. Saudi Arabia is not. The only religious based state in the world is Pakistan. You can win a lot of money in a bet in a pub on that. The Koran is the gospel

15:00 and the constitution is subservient to the Koran.

Just coming back to your role in the events there, we were talking about a few problems that started to arise. Did you have any involvement in respect to peace-keeping or were you strictly there just to study?

I was there to study. But the implications for my daughter and going to school there, at a convent in Quetta. And subsequently

15:30 I was in East Pakistan, now called Bangladesh. But East Pakistan was a subservient state, created by the British…It was subservient to the Punjabis of West Pakistan. It was actually called East Pakistan then, separated by India. Crazy, ridiculous Imperial creation, in 1947. And eventually they broke away, of course. And what was East Bengal, called East Pakistan,

16:00 now is Bangladesh. Downtrodden rice-eaters, they're wheat eaters in West Pakistan, you know, nothing to mould them together. But I did get involved in some of the discontent there. I was in Bangladesh there, in Chittagong and Dacca, the capital, and I saw some of the unrest, and India fermented it, that led to the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of the independent state, which could never survive. It's got no

16:30 hope of surviving, Bangladesh. It's just a basket case.

So you saw a lot of the problems there, but….

No, I wasn't able to be party to them, but once again, tremendous background for me, to understand conflicts in Afghanistan…and all around the world. Understanding Islam, just even that much more, and so….But Afghanistan was the major focus of my explorations and my involvement because of an

17:01 interest in history and architecture and archaeology and the whole bit. A fascinating country.

Just travelling forward. You were promoted in 1969. I take it you returned home?

After a year, I came home via Europe. And that was the incidents in Beirut….Or maybe not. I was going to Babylon, but they hanged thirteen people in the square in

17:30 Babylon, so I left Babylon out and went to Istanbul, came home via Karachi and picked up my daughter. Went to, I guess, army headquarters I think, and then went back to ANU. And this was a period of ANU that was very interesting. I was at ANU in 1969, '70, '71, and I must have finished my degree….No, I didn't graduate until '76….

18:01 I was in staff jobs, and I think I was promoted in 1970 to lieutenant colonel.

Just in respect, when you were studying in Quetta, obviously you were away from Australian society and immersing yourself in the books, but once you returned home for those two or three years, was it difficult at all to settle back into society? Given your Vietnam experiences?

Well, I guess, yes. I came back only for a few weeks, then disappeared again.

18:31 That's another interesting point. I haven't really registered on that perspective of my life. But I wasn't here. I went Vietnam, Pakistan….then back. So I was only away two years, then came back to Canberra and back into university. No, I found I couldn't discuss….I wasn't even terribly good at communicating with my family, so there would have

19:00 been some of those aspects. But I didn't dwell too much on that. It is only in hindsight that I see it.…And I wasn't very aware or conscious that this might be a problem for people. But I don't want to portray myself as a basket case, because of traumas in Vietnam. I think that can be overdone. You can also over do the macho side of being able to cope with everything. I'm aware of that, these days.

In respect to you and your wife,

19:30 **you were away in Vietnam for that time. When you came back was there an emotional distance between the two of you?**

Driving from the airport, she drove the car, and suddenly I grabbed the steering wheel, we were driving up South Dowling Street, I suddenly grabbed the steering wheel and pulled her onto the other side of the road and said "You're on the wrong side of the road." I had been driving a Jeep for six months straight. I had to have a stolen Jeep in Vietnam, because the Americans couldn't organise a Jeep. They could organise me

20:00 a B52 [Heavy bomber] attack, but they couldn't organise me a Jeep. So I used a stolen one for six months.…And I pulled into the oncoming traffic, we didn't smash fortunately, and she decided that was the most traumatic thing of my homecoming. I thought she was on the wrong side of the road. It just shows you how steeped in your surroundings you can be. I've done silly things like that after being in Europe for a while, but yeah, that was symptomatic. I thought things were all right, but if you interviewed her you would find that they probably weren't too good for a while, and

20:30 maybe for many years. But I still think it is up for you to cope, as the individual, so I don't think you should… But I can recognise it in others, and I'm certainly prepared, in the case of that lance corporal, I told you about that, I really tried to help him, because I know he wasn't coping. And that tells me how severe the rigours must have been for many, if not for all of us.

21:00 **Around 1972, you became CO of 7RAR which returned from Vietnam …Just on this particular subject, since they'd been overseas, what was it like dealing with them and trying to help them settle back in?**

In fact it was '71 to '73. I went to the Joint Services Staff College in the first part of '71, then took over 7RAR from mid-'71 to '73. Certainly there were some issues there, and drugs did surface

21:31 for the first time. We were into the '70s. And drugs surfaced in the Sydney environment of Holsworthy, which I suspect would be a legacy of Vietnam. And there wasn't an overwhelming problem, but it did exist. I think we tried to deal with it in a caring way. Rather than a disciplinary way. The army hadn't quite resolved its….

22:00 It took a long time to resolve whether you punished people or counselled them. And I don't recall whether we did that terribly successfully, one way or the other. I just stood off it a bit, because I wasn't sure myself, what was the best way to deal with it. A little like, almost, an alcoholic. Is he sick or is he just irresponsible. And the answer today that he is sick, if he is an alcoholic, therefore you treat him with

22:30 kid gloves. I don't think we were enlightened, if that is enlightened, thirty years ago.

Can you give me some examples of how you actually, or how the army actually dealt in a caring way with some of these men?

You mean on drugs? I don't think I'm

23:00 aware enough of the details. I'm not dodging it. I just think that times were changing and I know I was trying to sort of say, "Am I out of touch by saying they shouldn't be anywhere near any of this stuff, the soft drugs?" So I think somewhere along that we coped. We kept a lid on it. But I don't think we sacked too many soldiers if they were caught, at that stage. I don't remember getting terribly much guidance about it either. I do remember one thing from that time

23:30 which just shows the changing times, I rang the commanding officer of the ladies unit, the WRAAC unit, whom I knew quite well, at North Head. I said, "Your girls are quartered with my soldiers. I've just discovered over in the lines at Holsworthy for the annual athletics," I said, "they're in the blocks with the soldiers." I said, "I'm terribly sorry. What would you like me to do?" She said, "What's the problem, Ian?" I said, "What?"

24:00 She said, "I'd be more worried about your soldiers than I would be worried about my girls." And I said,

"God, times have changed." So this was about 1972, and I was terribly impressed with her, even though I felt like a bit of an old fuddy-duddy. But it was an interesting comment. I think the athletics team were billeted, in the same rooms, as far I could see. The girls and boys. So I was the one that was out of touch, I presume. She was a pretty normal, healthy lieutenant colonel. A lot of the women were

24:30 battleaxes, who were…I'll get in trouble for that…Who weren't too happy about fraternisation. But anyway, that's another example of grappling with the problems. I'm a thirty eight year old lieutenant colonel, thinking 'Oh cripes, we'd better segregate the girls.' So I was trying to make sure that I was in touch with reality. And maybe that made me think that maybe recreational drugs aren't too bad, but I was horrified when my children experimented.

25:00 And acted like a raging dad. So we've all had to work through this generational problem, and the progression or regression since the 1950s, of behaviour.

At the beginning of the day, we just discussed a little bit of this, about your work with 7RAR, and you said that these fellows had been fighting in Vietnam, then they've come back and you had to be enormously creative in respect to keeping their attention. Can you go through some of the things that you did?

25:33 Tried to keep them occupied, of course. So there's lots of sport, a fair bit of exercises, too. Earlier in the day we talked about, "What was the point?" In fact, we were talking about 4RAR in 1956 or '57. It was a similar situation in 1971–2–3, and

26:00 there was still plenty of scope for war, if you like. It was still pretty real. The junior officers weren't as good as I thought they'd been earlier on, because the cream had been in the battalion, too, and mostly they'd left and were replaced by fellows who didn't, hadn't been in Vietnam. Yes, there was a transitional

26:30 problem, and it wasn't as easy as it might have been. And Holsworthy social fabric, and affluence in the community, they're all sorts of things that….And the army wives, with the men away….The men had had a lot of education and a lot of experience, the women hadn't. Today, it's different because the young army wives have got degrees and are doing all sorts of jobs and have nannies with children.

27:00 There was a definite problem with the women being a bit left behind, and also isolated because of both the geography and also isolated because of the men's war experience, or traumatic or being them up. Yeah, definite social problems in the '70s in the Holsworthy area, that I think are being resolved much better today. I think, I hope.

Did you at all have

27:31 **in respect to the men and women and dealing with their relationships?**

I used to say, "In civilian life, we've got no roles in the bedrooms of our employees." When secretaries were living with executives, at various stages. That was my enlightened approach in the '80s and '90s, as a senior executive, in business.

28:00 In the paternal military thing, we tended to get more involved and more patronising, or trying to patch up differences….We had chaplains, but generally we took a very active interest in people, officers and soldiers. The young officers did a good job with the Diggers.

28:30 To put it in context, my first job in 4RAR, I was told I had to go down to a married quarters area, this was in 1956, and of course some corporal had come home from an exercise and found his wife in the bath with another man. And I'm a fresh faced graduate out of Duntroon, trying to work out what to do, other than call the padre.

29:00 So nothing changes, I suppose, in some ways. That is the sort of job that an officer has to do, and a senior NCO. In that case, the Diggers have to look after themselves, too.

Just in respect to padres, you mentioned that terrific Catholic fellow. Can you give me an overview of padres? The good and the bad?

Well, generally, the Catholic padres seemed to be the good ones, plus the Salvos [Salvation Army].

29:30 There have been some good Anglican ones…The Salvos were just fantastic in Vietnam and elsewhere, Malaya. Actually, I'm not sure how many Salvation Army people were in Vietnam, but I think they were…But generally, the padres were, as I say…I don't think there were any bad ones.

30:00 There were some who were just of average quality. But most of the good ones were the Roman Catholics. It just seems to be that they 'soldier on'. It seems to be something to do with the fact that they are used to the 'fraternity'. And all the troubles of the Catholic Church, today, yet I never witnessed any of that in the military circles. And anyway, the problems in all the churches now with celibate priests, I think, are in all churches, not just the Catholic.

30:30 **Just in respect to padres in general, outside Vietnam, was there a place for them within the force?**

Oh yes, definitely. I think so. I don't care how irreligious our community becomes, or how…almost

irrelevant, yes. Your question was about relevance. I think

31:00 there is a place, because the army can only reflect society, but we don't have a totally Godless society. We have an agnostic society, and we do have religious areas. But I suspect it is twenty per cent or something, twenty or thirty per cent at the most. But yeah, I think there is a place. This is a personal opinion now…Are you saying then? There was a place, certainly, when I was in the army, up until 1978, I believe.

Early in the '70s,

31:31 **before the war ended, from the Australian point of view, a lot of the peace protesters….What did you think of them in respect to having been….**

They had a right to protest. I say I'm fairly liberal in many ways. I guess some of them offended me if they were obviously rent-a-crowds, or people actively stopping things, like unions, not loading a ship with ammunition.

32:04 But I know that war solves nothing, generally. There might have been a war that solved something in history, but I can't recall it. And I'm a student of history. So people are entitled to their protests, as long as they do it peacefully. I think that was my attitude. It's certainly my attitude now.

32:32 I think it was then. I think I was as calm and as rational as I am now. If we're talking in the '70s.

Was Vietnam worth fighting for, and worth Australia's involvement?

The sixty four dollar question…In the context of events then, yes. I've rationalised it many times, but I'm not rationalising the overall aim.

33:00 I believe in the context of helping those people in South Vietnam….I didn't believe in the 'Domino Theory', then. I don't believe in it now. But in the context of being asked to help, we were sure, doing it for 'the alliance', but to help people who wanted to get, if you like, their produce to market, and not have their throats cut because of their political views or their religious views. I see it in the context of Phuoc Tuy province

33:31 as being an honourable cause for the Australian military. In the overall context of world events, Ho Chi Minh was a much better man than the puppets in the South. And American foreign policy was, in my opinion, barren and totally misunderstanding things, as it does today. So, in the overall context I would say, no, the war was not worth it. Because a million and a half

34:00 people died. And Ho [Chi Minh] would have only killed half a million. But that is a real pragmatists view. But in the overall context, no, not worth it. And I'm not saying that no war is worth it, I'm saying that one in retrospect was not. But the Australians can still hold their heads high in the limited context of our operations.

Given that you were an instructor in Malaya,

34:34 **for the jungle training, where in a sense did we go wrong and the Americans go wrong, in respect to jungle fighting against the North Vietnamese?**

We Australians didn't go wrong. And remember it wasn't all jungle either. A lot of it was open terrain, particularly in the dry season. You were fighting across almost like Australian wheat fields. There was no bloody water.

35:00 So it wasn't all a boggy swamp. And fires, you see, bush fires. We're fighting in February, just like in Australia, people fighting, tracers start grass fires, and the trees are alight. So you've got a dry dusty filthy horrible scrubby jungle. Almost like the National Park south of Sydney. The terrain, almost like a barren, withered…

35:40 So where did we go wrong? Well, the Australians performed pretty well in their own operations and insisting on being on their own. They did support American operations, of course, and particularly later on in the bigger battles of 'Coral' and 'Balmoral' and the Tet Offensive. But, Australia can hold its head up about its involvement in Vietnam.

36:01 Five hundred and something blokes were killed. That number of National Servicemen would have been killed on the roads over ten years, in Australia. Now that is a terrible rationalisation, no life is worth losing for pointless effort. But the number of people killed….That's why an Iraq justification of "No killed" is not right, either. We did a very good job within our scope, and we made a lot of friends, and Australia is held in high regard

36:30 in today's Vietnam, where America is not necessarily. So you can differentiate between the Australian and American effort. I see no reason to apologise for Australia's involvement in Vietnam. It wasn't correct in a sense because I believe in the nationalists' right to determine their own future, 'Ho' was a nationalist before he was a communist, so we went for the wrong reasons, but we did a good job and we have no reason to apologise.

37:00 **How important to you and even your own family was the 'Welcome Home' march?**

As I say, I didn't have one because I came individually.

Sorry, in 1987…

My wife tends to be pretty detached from these things. Although she threw herself into it when she was a wife of a commanding officer, to do her job. She tends to stand back a bit from these things. I don't think she gets

37:30 emotional about this sort of stuff. My daughter has always been a strongly emotional involvement with me and she is the one who sat down and listened to the tape of Bribie and tried to understand the transcripts once or twice. But one of the marvellous things that day was…

38:00 First of all, my platoon commander, my celebrated and decorated platoon commander, informed everyone that day in the battalion, all standing around the commanding officer, he said, "You punched the daylights out of me on New Year's Eve in 1966," or something, "and I went and hid four days." And this was a ridiculous statement by this young National Serviceman, and I didn't know whether it was catharsis or what.

38:30 I said, "First of all I couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag, and secondly, I'm sure I never king-hit you. Anyway, it would have been a terrible offence and you could have charged me." He said, "No, no, no. You hit me pretty hard. I went and hid with another battalion for a few days." Which I still, to this day, don't know if it was true, but I denied it. He was a bit of an irritant, this character, and he got into a lot of trouble, but he was a very fine young officer, and we're still very good friends to this day. And he just presented marvellously at the War Memorial. They brought him over from Perth to do it.

39:00 And we ring each other every year on the 17th of February, and that sort of thing. The March itself? Like I said, I didn't worry about being not welcomed home myself. I came home as an individual, and I just thought that was the population's loss, they will wake up sooner or later. Well, it was very important to a lot of the people that day. We gathered in a pub in Pitt Street, later on, and a young Swedish girl was with us, staying at our house…

39:30 Sweden was a great neutral country. And she was a gorgeous eighteen year old, and my son was about sixteen years old, and we gathered and we were drinking schooners at the pub at ten thirty in the morning, as you do, after a march through the city…I don't know what day it was, it must have been a Saturday morning. I remember seeing them as we turned our of George Street, I remember seeing this girl Jessica, the daughter of the Swedish ambassador, and my son, on the corner

40:00 and I thought, "Isn't that nice? They've come into the March." And then they somehow joined us at this pub. And then gradually the whole of the company seemed to emerge, including even the doctor, John Taskey, who was by then the senior colonel and a senior surgeon in Brisbane….Everybody just sort of relived the day and I saw my son and this daughter of the Swedish ambassador, the peace loving Swedish nation, seeing war at is almost best. The camaraderie, the spirit, the soldiers coming up and

40:30 saying remember this, remember that. And while there was memorial and sadness for people gone, that's what I like to see Anzac Day as a celebration, as a wake rather than a serious dirge, this was a superb day of some of the family meeting up with the Diggers. And the family of 'B' Company 6RAR, it was pretty impressive. And even extending across the world to Sweden.

41:00 A pretty nice feeling of camaraderie and a job well done, almost, too. That feeling of satisfaction.

Thank you so much for your time today.

Thank you. You are terrible interrogators.