

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Lange (Bob) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 4th March 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1558>

Tape 1

00:42 **Okay let's start with your life.**

Right well I was born in Crows Nest 1946. I went to school at the Convent School there and I remember being scared of the nuns and scared of the priest

01:00 and I left there and went to the high school at Crows Nest. I did to year 10 there but I was there three years. I did the second year twice. I wasn't satisfied with my results after the first two years so I did the second year ago. I worked in a garage in Crows Nest for four years and I got sick of my boss saying, "Get a haircut by Monday Lange or a new job." I didn't want to conform and I thought, "I want to get out of here." so I joined the army.

01:30 Twenty years, 137 days later, I became a civilian again. I had a job to go to before I got out of the army. I worked there for six weeks before I got out. Had a company car, good money and the night before I got out of the army the job died and the only satisfaction I got out of that was he went broke within 12 months owing \$60 million. So that was that.

02:00 I did it hard then. I did security work through '87 and I also sold life insurance and superannuation and then I got a job with the public service and I worked for social security. Started off doing filing in an office and then I went to what was called a mobile review team. We used to just go around and check people entitlements just to check that they were getting what they were entitled to

02:30 and that people say on unemployment weren't working because sometimes they forget and then I went from there onto an investigation team and then I ran an investigation team and then I was a trainer for two or three years and I went into prosecutions and then the wheels fell off and now I'm a retired pensioner and that's it.

Okay cool. We'll go right back to the start and

03:00 **tell us, we'll talk about growing up in Crows Nest. Tell us about your mum and dad.**

Old Dad worked in the saw mill. I remember once he came home and his one hand was almost hanging off. He got caught in a planing machine and they had taken him to the doctor and stitched it back up and it still works okay. But he worked there for 20-odd years

03:30 and then he left there and he joined the Main Roads [Department of Main Roads] and he worked there as I suppose a general hand sort of thing. Looking after the camp, putting road signs up and so on until he got to be 65 and then retired. Mum died about three or four years ago. She had cancer and he's now living on his own in Crows Nest. He's got a housing commission house there.

04:00 He's 85 now so he's getting a bit frail. He's had about seven hip replacements. The legs are starting to give out on him so I don't know how long he'll go for. That's really about it. He was in the volunteer fire brigade for 20 something years as well. That's really about it as far as they go I guess.

What's your earliest memory of growing up in Crows Nest?

I think it would be

04:30 looking at my grandmother's body in a coffin in the front room of the house. It was either that or the big fire. We had a big fire in Crows Nest. Took out about half of one street. It took out a pub, a bank and probably about 40 yards long and of course no town water and they had to find water. The Toowoomba Fire Brigade came out

05:00 but it was gone by then and I can remember looking out my sister's window and you could see the glow of the fire up over the picture theatre which was sort of up the street from us. So it was either that or my grandmother dead in the coffin would be my first memories.

How old were you then?

I really can't remember. Probably three, four, five. I'd be four, maybe three. I really can't remember. I know I started school at age five.

05:30 And where did you live in Crows Nest? Can you describe that for us?

Yeah, it was a really old house. Old hallway straight down the middle and country people. We had a front veranda and a back veranda and the back veranda was closed in and I suppose all up it would have had six bedrooms. There was four big ones and two small ones

06:00 and in the small ones my uncle Jack lived in one and he was a Second World War man and my mother's stepsister's uncle lived in the other bedroom. So when they sort of died or whatever we actually then got a bathroom. We converted one of those small bedrooms into a bathroom

06:30 and that beat the hell out of sitting in a round tub in the kitchen which wasn't real good and so we had a wood stove and you know the kitchen was big enough to eat in and then we had the massive dining room I suppose. This monstrous big wooden table and a big stool behind it and the stool must have some sort of magic spell on because anybody that laid down on it used to go to sleep

07:00 and that was that. The house was falling down it was so old but when we lived there part of the job was keeping the gardens going. Mum had a massive flower garden because the house was in the centre of three blocks. On one block we used to grow corn and then there was potatoes and sweet potatoes and but the front garden was always full of roses and other flowers and the nuns used to come

07:30 down and knock them about. That's really about the house. Of course it's gone now but we lived in a few houses.

Can you tell me what it was like taking a bath in the middle of the kitchen? How did that work?

We had a round tub and a metre or so across and half a metre deep and you heated the water on the wood stove. We only had one tap inside the house and that was a cold water tap.

08:00 We thought we were pretty good actually when we got the hot water thing put on the side of the stove and when we got electricity through the house that was really good too and the old style switches. We used to hook a piece of string up and you could run the piece of string up the door and across the roof and you could get into bed and then you could switch the light off. You couldn't switch it back on but you could turn it off but the kitchen was a nice warm place to have a bath. It was

08:30 a bit embarrassing depending on if anybody was visiting at the time and there was no TV [television] so while one was having a bath the other could go and listen to the wireless and if my sister was in the bath we really had to go and listen to the wireless and you think back on it now and think, "God." but some people did have bath tubs and we eventually got another couple of taps in the house but we never ever

09:00 had hot water in that house. It was always boiled on the stove.

So when it was bath time was there did everyone use the same water in the bath?

Some of us did. Say you always had the worry about who peed in the bath so there was usually an argument about who would go first because none of us trusted the others. My sister usually got to go first and there was usually at least two of us had to use the same bath water

09:30 because we were all on tank water and I was the oldest boy so quite often I got to go second and that wasn't too bad because you know it wasn't ladylike for her to go in the bath so you were pretty safe following her but I know my brothers were worried about following me.

And how did those arguments get decided?

Usually who was there first. But I got a bit of preference

10:00 being the oldest so that wasn't too bad, and after I left school in 1962 and started working and because I was working I automatically had rights to the next bath so that was okay. I only lived about 200, 250m from where I worked so it was all right and it's different

10:30 when you think back on it but then it was normal you know.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

One sister. She still lives in Crows Nest. One brother, two brothers. One lives up at Hervey Bay. He works on a coal mine, I think it is the Gregory Mine north of Emerald. He drives a dumper. My younger brother lived at Cooroy and back in about 1980 he

11:00 lost his wife and oldest son in an electrified creek up there and he worked at the saw mill up there for about 25 years and he remarried and the area got at him a bit so now he lives in Melbourne and he works in a mattress factory down there. You probably couldn't get much further away from a saw mill than a mattress factory but he works for a mob of Greeks down there that own that

11:30 and their mattresses cost about \$1,000 and he's happy down there so Melbourne's got everything he really wants.

So as kids growing up together what did you do for fun?

We used to sneak across the road and down in to the creek. The creek was only 50 yards away and we used to play cowboys. We had this big fernhouse down at the back

12:00 of the house and the favourite hiding place was up on that and my brothers would come around the house looking for you and you'd be hiding up on that and they'd would expect you to be there so you had to lie in a way that they couldn't see you or your outline through the ferns. So that was probably the main thing, then as we got a bit older we used to do a lot of fishing and I, I think I turned 16 or 17 I bought a .22 rifle [.22 calibre rifle].

12:30 I used to do a lot of bush shooting and you'd get. When I first started shooting we were shooting for food because there was not a lot of money so you would go out and shoot a couple of hares and you'd clean them and bring them home and they'd go in the freezer for a couple of weeks and that would take the gamey taste out of them and then you'd

13:00 cook them up and they were really nice eating. A nice dark meat but Mum used to make a good stew out of them and you'd shoot wallabies for the skins and when I started working that took on a bit more importance. There was a drought on up there about when I started work so a lot of the farmers were giving us \$2 for a pair of wallaby ears to show that we had shot it off their lucerne or something and then the

13:30 butcher would give us \$2 for body which they would boil up for pig food and the slaughterman used to give us \$2 a skin so we were getting \$6 a wallaby which would pay for your ammunition, your fuel and a couple of beers. As a kid our back door you could look up across the back paddocks and see the back of the pub.

14:00 Dad would often send me up the pub to get a couple of beers and Pat the barmen who worked there probably all his life - even when the pub was sold Pat was part of the deal - and Pat would go out the back and wave to him and Dad would wave to him to let him know it was all right and that went on like that for about six to eight months and then Pat didn't worry anymore. So that opened the door and I could buy us a couple of bottles of beer

14:30 for ourselves so that's how we spent some of our wallaby money. I had a 54 Customline and I had a seat covers made out of Whip Tailed Wallaby skins and mini skirts, backless dresses and girls got in that and helped us. It was magnificent. I had quite a few rifles.

15:00 I've still got about 10 or 11, I guess. I don't shoot anymore. When I came home from Vietnam I decided - I bought a new car and I decided I would go and get another set of seat covers and I went up behind the local cemetery and I saw a wallaby and it saw me and it took off and I knew by the speed and its motion that it wasn't going to go far so I went over the top of the hill to meet it and I come up

15:30 over a rock and it was sitting their eating and it looked at me and I ducked down and I come up again and got the sights on it. It's got to be a head shot so you don't have a hole in the skin and it sat up and looked at me and I couldn't shoot the damn thing and I haven't shot any since. All I've shot is a couple of snakes. I've had to put a few animals down and that sort of thing

16:00 and the only other thing I shot was a wild pig and I got that just after I came home. I very rarely shoot. Most of the guns I've got are old .303s [.303 Lee Enfield rifles]. I've got one made in 1915 and the machine work on those old things was magnificent and I've got a double-barrelled shotgun in there with exposed hammers and probably now 100 years old maybe a bit more and that's why

16:30 I've got that. And I've got an old 310 which used to be a CMF [Citizens Military Forces] and cadet rifle and that's why I've got that. I've got a .22 which used to belong to my father and that's why I've got that. I don't shoot anymore. It's not the same anymore.

Bob when you were growing up in Crows Nest what did the family eat for meals?

Mince. We'd go to Toowoomba

17:00 once a fortnight and that was 28 miles, about 42 kms away. Dad never had a car. We used to go in with a guy that he worked with and buy half a sheep and of course it was cheaper to buy it in there and you'd take that home and you'd eat that. There'd be, it was always mince cooked up in all different sorts of ways and we had wonderful things like

17:30 brains, liver and so on which I really liked, but they are not real good if you have a tendency to have gout or something like that, and you get your cold meats. It's amazing just how well we did body-wise because there never really seemed to be quite enough, but nobody went hungry

18:00 really. That was it. We only lived 150 yards from the school and when we had lunch at school there was only the four of us if my sister was there and we used to have a big square biscuit tin full of sandwiches and there would be the old KR [KR Darling Downs smallgoods producer] camp pie which would be all

mashed up and Mum would mash some tomatoes into it and all that and we'd have that. The three of us for lunch and we used to feed half the school.

- 18:30 They always used to say when are you having lunch at school again because our sandwiches were always good so I suppose the quality of the meal was always there.

Can you remember starting school?

Yeah I was pretty scared but the nuns were pretty fearsome. The sisters of St Joseph or the Brown Josephs they were called and there was this really old one and

- 19:00 she was really a nice person but because she was so old and she seemed so strict she scared you and there was another one. She's still alive this one over at, around Nundah somewhere, the Josephs have a home there and she was brutal. If kids were treated the way now that we were treated then they would go for child abuse.
- 19:30 And she admitted a couple of years ago when we were up there for a school reunion thing that she was there to instil some discipline into the school and she did it. It didn't matter whether it was right or wrong. You'd get flogged for practically nothing so we were all really good Catholics. You would go to mass at least once during the week and always on
- 20:00 Sunday and you had to sit down the front where the nuns could control you and it was not always a really good time and I was having a lot of trouble at school and I remember my grandmother being up there once and he was trying to get me to spell 'who' and I used every combination of those letters possible without getting it right and I just couldn't get it anyhow then. I always had a pain in my belly
- 20:30 you see and they took me to a doctor eventually and I had appendicitis and I had this for months and months and months so they rushed me into Toowoomba and my Dad's boss had a black Holden, the first model Holden out and I threw up in the back of that and I got into Toowoomba and they took my appendix out and I came back and the pain was gone. And then my schoolwork improved and I was pretty much top of the class for a couple of years and then the school nurse came around
- 21:00 and we were all scared of the school nurse because she was going to run her hands over your groin. We weren't going to let some female do that and she gave me an eye test and she said, "This boy needs glasses." and I said, "That can't be right." You see a plane flying over and I can pick it up, but it might have been imagination, I don't know, but I got to wear glasses and then my school work improved even more. When I was in grade seven
- 21:30 I spent half of the year in grade seven with the kid in grade eight. We only had one kid in grade eight and he needed some competition so the nun put me up into grade eight with him and that was okay but for one test she gave us the 1953 scholarship exam, which was the hardest one ever. Hardly anyone passed it and there was only three subjects you know.
- 22:00 There was English, arithmetic and social studies and we both failed it and she abused and belted me and, "You think you're so good doing this grade eight and look at this result." and I couldn't do it. I didn't ask to do it. The year later I did the genuine exam and I got through that without any problems but the nuns,
- 22:30 I really didn't go for. This particular one was very brutal.

What sort of things did the nuns discipline kids for?

Well they, at the convent they used to have some girl boarders come in off from the farm and that was probably their main recruiting ground for nuns, but I remember one girl, when I was a kid they used to get those chewing gum or bubble gum or something

- 23:00 and the wrapper, if you wet it you could push it on your skin, well, one girl had one on her leg just above the knee and the nun saw it and she flogged her and she couldn't sit down for two days and that was just one reason. You could look sideways or say something in class and you would get it again. I remember as a kid we went to what was called a mock Deb Ball [Debutante's Ball]. Out in the country
- 23:30 the girls make their debut well they had a mock one and the women dressed as men and the men dressed as women. The only experience I've had with cross-dressing actually, I really didn't like it, and the name they gave me for this was Girty Guttersnipe and I wasn't really happy with it and I told sister and I got a flogging for that. "Do you know what a guttersnipe is?" I had no idea. I was six or seven year old and for that I got a flogging.
- 24:00 And that's the sort of thing. You get flogged for almost anything so I don't have an awful lot of good memories of that.

What did getting a flogging entail?

It could be the cane. They were pretty good with that and not satisfied with using in your hands, you'd get it across the backside on the way back to your seat. If your writing wasn't right you would get the ruler across

- 24:30 your knuckles and if the cane wasn't deemed suitable you would have to go across to the Pepperina Tree, break some little branches of that, and if that broke while she was flogging you, you'd have to go back and get another one. So that was really what they did.

Where did they discipline you?

Sometimes in front of the other kids. If you were going to get a good flogging it would out in the little

- 25:00 storeroom sort of. So, yeah and I was very religious at that stage too. Mainly through fear. I became an altar boy. The priest was good. He was also fearsome but he was a really nice old bloke. A gentlemen and the first one I remember was old Father Hayes and he was a grey head old man and he was had a wealth of

- 25:30 knowledge on all the aboriginals in the area and he had an old model Holden as well. He drove that until it was falling apart and after that it was Father Nolan and he always drove a big V8 Ford. I think his family bought it for him, now the Parish Council buys the priests the car but Father Nolan was a wonderful bloke. He treated all the kids really well but if you were playing up at home

- 26:00 it would be, "I'll tell the constable about you or I'll tell Father Nolan about you." If you were really bad it was, "I'll tell the nuns." and that stopped you. We had two kids did a job for Father Nolan there one day and he paid them six bob each, 60c each and they went back and they showed it to this old nun there and

- 26:30 she immediately took it off them and put it in the box for the 'propagation of the faith', it was called. It was used for spreading the faith and their \$1.20 might have done a little bit for the faith but it didn't do much for their faith but that was the way they were.

What would a kid have done with 60c?

You could buy the world, aye. It was 1 and six to get in the pictures and

- 27:00 I think it was about a shilling for a malted milk at the most. It might have been only 10 pence at the first. You could do so much. You felt so rich. You felt rich if you had two bob, you know, 20c. She took it off them. So not a good decision.

What did the nuns and the priests wear?

The nuns had their brown habits. They originally had the white piece

- 27:30 across here and down here and then the Josephs changed to all brown and it wasn't stiff around there anymore and the priest usually wore his black trousers. Sometimes a black shirt, sometimes a white shirt and of course he had the tassel as well on formal occasions.

You were just talking about when you were misbehaving

- 28:00 **at home the things your parents used to threaten you with. How did your parents discipline you if you misbehaved?**

A piece of wood out of the kit box. That was usually the way because you would get old pine cases from the café and split the boards for the fire so they would about that long and about that wide and you would get a whack with that or a couple. As you got older you, I suppose your sins became worse and you might

- 28:30 and you might get the ironing cord but we never really probably. We probably never got hit as much as we should at home but we certainly made up for it at school.

What sort of things were misbehaving at home?

Climbing up on the fernhouse was one of them. We weren't allowed up there. Just generally fighting, breaking something you shouldn't have had.

- 29:00 I remember I was about seven year old and I just made my first confession and first communion, as it was called, and I knew I wasn't allowed out of the house in my new black shorts and my new white shirt but the creek was in flood and I went across the road to have a look at it and I tore my new white shirt on the barbed wire fence. So I think the

- 29:30 expectancy of the punishment was worse than the actual punishment, but that was my own fault and you know you might get into trouble for going outside the yard or chucking rocks at the kids going past and that's about it.

We were just talking about your good clothes. What did you used to wear just to school?

Shirts and a t-shirt. Sometimes, once a year

- 30:00 when the school sports were on I'd probably get a pair of sandshoes and I'd wear them until they wore out and then you go back to bare feet, and when I got up to about grade seven or eight, I actually had school shoes and then in high school you used to have the uniform but I never had, until I was in high school I never had a good pair of long trousers. We weren't allowed to have jeans because Mum

considered

30:30 jeans were something worn by bodgies [disapproved of youths] and so on. Your normal hoons [youths] around the street now so we weren't allowed a pair of jeans until I started work and I bought my own.

Can you explain what a bodgie is?

Well I guess your normal idiot kid hanging around the streets. Some of them had motor bikes. Some of them had cars and they'd spin the wheels, those that could

31:00 and they'd get into fights and around Richmond they had gangs of them pretty much the same as they have gangs now. The street kids basically. Bodgies was just a name for them back then and their girlfriends were called widgees. I, when I started work I knew a few of them in Toowoomba and we got on pretty well with a lot of them. One night we went into a haunted house and I

31:30 went down and I had a girl on each side of me because I had the torch and that was the only reason they were hanging on to me too and I pulled this curtain down as I turned around and it fell down and it landed on one of the girls. Well she screamed and before I knew where I was back outside the house because these two girls grabbed me and ran for the door. You know so we had some experiences with them but they weren't

32:00 really bad people. You know there were less people around then to do you in for doing something relatively harmless, whereas now my sister-in-law's kid got dobbled in for doing donuts in his car and in a little town like Crows Nest. Everybody knows what you've done up there. Even know I don't know very many of the people anymore but

32:30 in a little town there's always someone who sees what you're doing and we used to get dobbled in occasionally and the cop would come up and, "I know what you did last night. You do it again and I'll kick your arse." But at the same time the week before I finished school the local constable pulled me up on my pushbike at the school gate and he said, "Come here young Robert." and I thought, "Oh shit, what have I done?" and I'm quickly thinking of excuses and alibis and he said, "When do you finish school?"

33:00 and I said, "Friday next week." "What are you going to do then?" "I'm going to do nothing. I'm going to look for a job." "Not good enough. Get in the car." "I'm not getting in the police car." He said, "Get in and come with me." and I said, "I'll follow you on my bike." And he said, "Put your bike in Bailey's yard and get in the car or I'll put you in there." So I did. And he took me down the local Ford garage and we pulled up

33:30 and we sat there and he said, "Well." And I said, "Well what?" And he said, "Get out of the car." So I got out of the car and he said, "Come on." and we went in the garage and he found the boss there, Ron Blinko, and I went to school with Ron's son Doug. We were in the same class. And he said, "You know Mr Blinko." And I said, "Yes." I thought, "What's wrong with this bugger? Of course I know him." And he said, "Well." "Well what?" "Ask him for a

34:00 bloody job." And I said, "Have you got any jobs?" and he said, "When do you finish school?" and I thought, "God I've got a live one here. I got to school with his son and I finish school on the same day." And I said, "Well Friday of next week." And he said, "All right you can have a week off after that and then you start work here at 8.00 Monday morning. Come in while you are off that week and get measured for a set of overalls." And that was, now city cops don't usually do that type of thing but country cops did

34:30 and I said to him years after, I kept in touch over the years and I said, "Why did you do that?" and he said, "Because the people you were hanging around with, you'd have probably ended up in gaol." and that was it. So that was Crows Nest.

Do you know how many people were in Crows Nest?

Then about eight or 900. It's grown a lot since then but you knew everyone. You could go out and you

35:00 didn't have to lock your house. It just didn't matter. No one stole anything. You'd come home and he was something on the kitchen table that someone had dropped off for you and a lot of us dogs and one dog I had was a cross between a boxer and border collie or Scot collie or something and he knew all me mates

35:30 and one of them went down there one night and the dog is jumping all over him and he walked up the steps and knocked and there was no one home and the dog wouldn't let him back down the back steps and he was still sitting there when I came home about 10 minutes later. But you know it's not like it is now. You can't leave your house unlocked even if you are home in the house unless you are sitting in the lounge room where the door is, you don't have it unlocked.

Can you describe Crows Nest for us?

As it was then. You came into town heading north from Toowoomba came past the police station on your right. Came up to the post office on your right and it went around basically on three sides of a square. You turned right at the post office, left, left again and the basically you'd go north to Cooya or Blackbutt and in the middle of that big U shape

- 36:30 was the railhead and the railway station was there and at the end of the railway line were the pig and cattle yards so summertime it was a little bit smelly in the middle of town but never had a Tuesday in Crows Nest. Tuesday was pig and calf sale day, and I would be at the garage and a farmer would come in and say, "Listen young fella, book the car in for a service next Pig Day."
- 37:00 because Tuesday was always referred to as Pig Day. Monday, Pig Day, Wednesday and that was in Crows Nest. And even after the railway finished the old farmers still referred to Tuesday as Pig Day. They shifted the sale yards out of time and the sales would go on Tuesday and the train would be out Wednesday morning and take all the pigs away and the calves and whatever else was going.
- 37:30 Now the rails gone and the road goes straight ahead now at the post office and on the right hand side in that what's now a square is the town park and it's beautiful. And on the left where the railway station used to be is a swimming pool and a bowls club, ambulance station, doctor surgery. The old shire office as it used to be called, art gallery and the John French VC [Victoria Cross] Memorial
- 38:00 is there.
- What sort of shops were there when you were a kid?**
- There was I think three cafes, two butcher shops. After the fire only one pub. The RSL [Returned and Services League] Hall or the School of Arts as it was called then and it had the library in it as well and my uncle Jack used to look after the snooker room in that and they have full-sized tables.
- 38:30 Magnificently kept tables and there were two banks, the ANZ [Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited] and the National [National Australia Bank]. The National burnt down in the big fire and it's now operating. The ANZ has closed and that has been replaced by Heritage Building Society. There were two or three garages; three, possibly four garages and
- 39:00 a couple of drapers, a shoe shop, a photographers shop, the real estate agent. The original Ray White office was in Crows Nest and they have actually kept that building and they have on the edge of town now where the show grounds used to be and the cricket ground now is historical corner they call it. All the young people often call it hysterical corner. But they have all these old
- 39:30 buildings there. There was a dentist. I think he was good at the jackhammer. A lot of his stuff is there and a lot of stuff from old people in Crows Nest and the original Ray White shed is there too and there was another auctioneer. Angus McDermott & Son. He was a prisoner of war with the Japanese I think, in Changi or the
- 40:00 Burma Railway in World War II, and I think he lives now up around Kingaroy. That was really about the town and the never spoke about that. It wasn't until I went up there probably five or six years ago for one Anzac Day march that I found out how many of those old farmers had been in the Second World War.
- 40:30 It was just never really spoken about. In retrospect now that they worked out what things like PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] are. We've had it a lot better than they did because they had no one to talk to. The only thing they had better was they could be pulled back from the front into a relatively safe area for a while
- 41:00 and they came home by ship. So they had weeks and weeks to adjust. A lot of us came home by air - seven or eight hours and you didn't adjust, and but it's still a nice little town Crows Nest.

Tape 2

- 00:30 **We might start with going to high school.**
- Yeah. That really wasn't too bad. It was a pretty new high school and the best thing about that high school was the fact that the school hat I had was originally worn by John French who won the VC from Milne Bay because his mother and father lived just up the street
- 01:00 from us and his mother gave me the hat so that was probably the best thing about starting high school. Of course you had a uniform and I needed a push bike to get there so that was a big thing too. It wasn't bad. The headmaster wasn't too bad. His son was in high school too. He was in the same class I was and he hated him. He reckoned he was a mongrel and then
- 01:30 I did what we called sub junior and junior which is year nine and 10 and there was some nice girls there and there were some un-nice girls there and the same with the blokes. I wasn't a cricketer by any means. The eye wasn't quick enough to see a fast ball and I played football for the school and that was okay, and when I did the junior exam
- 02:00 as it was called or the year 10 exam, I got two Bs and two Cs out of eight subjects and I thought, "This isn't good enough." because in primary school when I did the public scholarship or year eight exam, I breezed through that. I got over 90 percent in maths and English and about 65 or 70 [percent] or

something for social studies, which I didn't like, and I didn't work much harder at high

- 02:30 school so it wasn't enough so a mate of mine got the same and we decided we would do the year again so I went up and saw the headmaster and said, "I want to do it again but I don't want to do French." He said, "What are you going to do during French period?" and I said, "Well, I didn't do real well in geography and I thought I might study that." and that was a sure thing
- 03:00 because he was a geography teacher, you see, so that helped with that and just after we started that year he was replaced by another headmaster who was a pig and we nicknamed him Percy because he... Well on the radio at this stage there was a little comedy show called Greenbottle and it was an English show and there was only about three kids in the class
- 03:30 and this Greenbottle was one of them and he was a dill [fool] and the headmaster was a bloke named Percy Pim so we nicknamed him Percy and even his daughter hated him. At least the previous bloke, his daughter didn't mind him. This bloke was just an arrogant, overbearing pig and he treated his teachers and his students the same and he was terribly unpopular and
- 04:00 he made me do French again. I wasn't happy with that and I went and saw the teacher and said, "I don't want to be here." She was a lovely looking little thing and that made it a bit easier to just sit back in the corner and, "You forget that I am there and I won't do anything wrong and you don't ask me any questions." and she said, "All right." so I got away with that and that year at the end of the year when I did the exams again I got two As, two Bs and two Cs,
- 04:30 so I just didn't bother going for the French exam and that was high school. We, Leigh and myself took a week off once and went fishing, shooting and swimming and we'd have got away with that only that the last two days, took another mate of ours and his father owned a cordial factory. Made the local soft drink and they're still going in a different location but
- 05:00 they are sold now out as far as Alice Springs and the Sunshine Coast and so on, so Philip came with us. Anyway, on the Friday afternoon we were having such a good time swimming that we got home late so I put him on the pushbike and doubled him home because he had to be home to help his father in the cordial factory and he was worried because he got into trouble. "Where have you been?"
- 05:30 "Ms Joyce kept me in." Now that was a mistake because Ms Joyce was a friend of his older sister and she came around to see Barbara that night and Barbara said, "Colleen, I don't think you should come in. Dad's not happy with you at the moment." "Why?" "Because you kept Philip in after school today and he's supposed to work in the factory." "Philip hasn't been to school for the last two days."
- 06:00 She said, "There's been a couple of kids away all week." And Barbara said, "Well when Philip came home this afternoon, Bob Lange was doubling him home on the bike." And she said, "Bob Lange hasn't been there all week and neither has Leigh Fuller." So Monday it all came out. So old Percy gave us the cane and enjoyed it but we still managed to take a day off here and there and go fishing and shooting and swimming.

06:30 **What happened when you took a day off?**

You'd write a letter, and I could forge my Mum's signature pretty well. The trick with that was the way she made the 'M' in her name. Her name was Mavis and the M came up in a point all the way. If you got that right you were okay.

Did you get caught any other times?

No. No. There was, one of the advantages of having the creek

- 07:00 right across the road you'd be looking around and there was no one there and straight across into the creek. That was all you had to worry about.

Where was the high school? In Crows Nest?

Yes it was. I don't know. It joined onto the railway line where it used to go. I suppose it was on the western side of town up towards the golf club area. It's still there.

- 07:30 They closed the old primary school down and moved it to the same area. They did pretty well there.

How many kids were at the high school?

When I was there probably only a couple of hundred. It hadn't been going all that long and you see they only had year nine and 10 and they brought year eight and they gradually moved up to I don't know about 300 or 400 there at the most but if you

- 08:00 wanted to go past year 10 you had to go to Toowoomba, and it was really only the rich kids that had to go in there.

You said you had to have a pushbike to get to school.

Yeah.

Can you describe your pushbike for us?

It had headlight, tail light, big white handlebars which I made even wider. Sort of like motorbike handlebars they were,

08:30 and it had a geared back wheel so I had three gears. It had front and back handbrakes. It had ribbons hanging off the handlebars. It was a real flash bike. I made the handlebar probably about 15 cms longer by sticking a hunk of steel down the handlebar and getting another handlebar and cutting it up and having it all welded together

09:00 and then you put your big plastic or rubber hand grips on there. It looked pretty good.

How did most of the kids get to school?

From out of town they came in a variety of school buses. Probably about four or five school buses, and I'm sure that one bloke was drunk most of the time for the afternoon bus. He had this massive old DeSoto and it just looked like a big car

09:30 but it had the big dual wheels on the back of it and all the doors down the left-hand side so each row of seats had it's own door and it was a bit crazy. I think he had always had a few. I pulled up at a corner one afternoon because he used to come down from the school and turn about 45 degrees left and the 45 degrees right and then he'd go around to the convent school and pick up the kids there and I'm on my left and I've got my

10:00 handlebar leaning against the guide post and he came so close to me that the ribbon on the handlebar on the right hand side scrapped down the side of the bus. And they said, "Wally was drunk this afternoon. Don't worry about it." but he never ever had an accident. So he was all right.

How old were you at this point when you went to high school?

Thirteen, 14, and 15 I think

10:30 I would have been.

What about girls? Were you interested in girls then?

Oh yeah. Some. Sort of never really had a lot of success at high school. There was one there I was deeply in love with and I took her to the show once the Crows Nest Show and we went swimming a few times but that was really about it. Then I started work and then there was

11:00 another one I had an interest in. I took her out for a while. I was a Catholic and her father was a strict Lutheran and the two didn't mix. He didn't like her being with me. You know because back then being a Catholic if you wanted to go to another church service you had to get approval from your priest.

11:30 I used to mime a cornet in the town band because I couldn't read music but I could play all the Anzac Day hymns but I had to ask the priest each year, "Is it okay to go the Anzac Day march as part of the band?" And the nuns at that stage used to actively discourage you from going to it because we could celebrate Anzac Day better in the church and that's the way the

12:00 religions were then. It's different up there now. They have combined services and so forth. But back then it was like that.

At what age did guys generally start going out with girls?

Probably around that 13. You know when I was 17 I got my first car. It was a 1949 Studebaker and I got that for \$10 and sold it for

12:30 \$50 and then I got the '54 Customline and I bought that through work and that was a magnificent old motor car. Once you had a car you know you had a little bit more luck then and I took a couple out from around Crows Nest and then I met one or two from Toowoomba.

13:00 I don't know. One of the ones from Toowoomba, I saw her again before I went to Vietnam and she was going to be my girlfriend and all that and she was the Lutheran one and I came home and I gave her this magnificent gold silk pyjama set with black silk buttons on, and at that stage she was living at Maroochydore and I rang her up one day and said, "Can I come up and see you this weekend?" and she said, "I don't know. My boyfriend mightn't like it."

13:30 And she hadn't mentioned him the whole year. So that sort of bugged that. It, Toowoomba was a lot better as far as girls were concerned because obviously there was more of them and their fathers didn't know you. Around Crows Nest everyone knew what you were like and what you were likely to get up to with their daughters and...

How did kids get their knowledge of sex back then?

I was given a couple of books by my father -, "Read that." and that was it. Girls I suppose pretty much the same and I suppose the learning was reinforced in the back seat of a car. Sometimes the front seat depending on

14:30 how much room there was. There were a few pregnancies but not a hell of a lot considering. The guys,

even the older guys were too embarrassed to go to the chemist and buy a packet of condoms in Crows Nest because old Eric the chemist would know who you were going out with and, "Oh yeah, they are doing it."

15:00 so if you wanted condoms you had to buy them in Toowoomba or get somebody who didn't give a stuff to buy them for you. We had one bloke there his nickname was 'Dobey' and he'd go and get them for you. There'd be no worries there because at this stage they were building this dam up there at Perseverance [Perseverance Dam] and Dobey worked on that and he didn't give a stuff what people thought about him. A lot of strangers in town

15:30 but the local boys were still reluctant to go into the chemist and buy condoms. So I used to get mine in Toowoomba but I don't know how many times I've walked into a chemist shop and come out with a packet of Aspros [aspirin] because you were embarrassed to ask the girl for them and you couldn't always get the bloke behind the counter, so sex education, I suppose, by trial and error, and my seat covers helped me

16:00 a lot. Because they were good.

From your knowledge were a lot of people sexually active before they got married?

Yeah. Around my age probably 60-70 percent of them. You know there wasn't a lot to do around Crows Nest. There was one area called Back Creek and that's too populated now

16:30 and then there was Barkers Lane. That was another place and people lived down there so you can't do that anymore and you go down towards the waterfalls and that was all right but people live down there now. Then you go down to the old Perseverance Dam and find a nice spot down there and that was okay or you'd go to Toowoomba and park at Picnic Point or Mt Guynoc or go to the drive in [missing text?]

17:00 and then there was Barkers Lane. That was another place and people lived down there so you can't do that anymore and you go down towards the waterfalls and that was all right but people live down there now. Then you go down to the old Perseverance Dam and find a nice spot down there and that was okay or you'd go to Toowoomba and park at Picnic Point or Mt Guynoc [?] or go to the drive in. Just as long as someone was watching that you left when the movie was finished it was all right.

Do you think your parents knew what you were getting up to?

They were suspicious. At least with one girl and they were right but they were sort of. The thing with it was you were like the government, you would either admit or deny,

17:30 because with some girls you would take out they would assume you were and if you denied it they would say, "Bullshit." at the same token if you said, "Yes." they would say, "Bullshit." They didn't want to believe you whichever way you went, and a mate of mine was taking this girl out and she was a pretty little thing and everyone said, "Oh yeah, him and her, the first night they went out, in the back of Art's car."

18:00 Art had a 69 Holden. Anyhow, I came home from Vietnam on R & R [Rest and Recreation] for a mate's wedding and I took this girl out with the same idea in mind because I'd always like, we'd always got on well together and we were at this old people's home where she worked in the laundry and we had all her clothes off and half of mine and she said, "You'll be gentle won't you?" and I said, "Yeah, why?"

18:30 and she said, "I've never done this before." And I said, "But you and so-and-so did it all the time." And she said, "I put my hand on his crotch one night and he nearly shit himself." They'd never done it and of course, that killed it for me because I really did like the girl and I said, "We'd better not do this because I'm going back to Vietnam in two days." I assumed she would have been on the pill.

19:00 I'm sure it was there then. I can't remember what they used but I assume she would have been okay. I didn't have any condoms with her and, "I could be dead in a fortnight and I don't want you to be here and possibly pregnant, see." So by the time I'd come home she'd found a boyfriend and he was a nice bloke too, so I got over that,

19:30 but this bloke was saying, "Yeah, we're doing it all the time." and they weren't. I believed her, but that 54 Customline was good though.

Was losing your virginity a really big deal?

I think it was. The manager at the garage I used to work at used to say, "Lange, the first you have it, you'll think a flock of sparrows flew out of your arse." And

20:00 of course by that stage I was having it pretty regular anyhow so I knew he was wrong, but the first one, it's like a bloke said to me, "I remember the first time I had sex. I was out in the barn. It was dark. I was scared, nervous, unsure of what to do, alone and that was it."

20:30 and it reminded me of that. I wasn't alone. It was, I suppose it was a feeling of exhilaration. I've finally done it and it was good and it was for a long time and I still see her. She and her husband are separated. I haven't seen her, what, two years now, but I still see him occasionally

- 21:00 when I go up to Grantham to buy the hay for the horses he lives in Esk and I often pull up and have a cup of coffee with him. He introduced, he used to introduce me as the boyfriend, like her boyfriend you know but there's never been anything between us sexually since she got married and I got married but there was a lot before that.
- 21:30 **So where did you first have sex?**
- In the back of the Customline. Not Picnic Point. There was a very dark spot up on the south-eastern side of Toowoomba. Echo Valley it was called. We were down there.
- And so what happened? You would drive the car out there. Were there other cars around?**
- 22:00 Not where I went there weren't. Picnic Point was too crowded and we'd done a lot of other stuff first, you know, plenty of times. But that night was going to be the night so I wanted somewhere really private. The last thing you wanted was a cop tapping on the window.
- Did that happen to people?**
- It did a couple of times. It happened to me once. We were parked under a tree near a sports ground and
- 22:30 I still see that girl actually too but a cop came along and, "What the hell are you doing?" and I thought, "That's a stupid question." He could see. Neither of us had very much on but he said, "Put your clothes on and go home." So we did. You never argued much. The Toowoomba cops hated Crows Nest boys and Gatton boys. The Gatton cops
- 23:00 hated Toowoomba and Crows Nest boys and the Crows Nest cops hated the others so you never argued with them.
- Were there many pregnancies?**
- Not a lot. Probably I know of about three.
- And what would happen to them?**
- Well one girl got married and had twins on the same day. The others left town and
- 23:30 they normally sort of adopted the kids out back then because it was really frowned on. You felt sorry for that and even when you took the risk of having sex without protection, you were still as careful as you could be, but if you got a bit too excited, anything could happen, and there were times when sometimes the girl didn't
- 24:00 want to stop either and that made things terribly awkward, so it was amazing there weren't more really with the amount of people doing it. Just luck I guess, luck came into it.
- So you left school.**
- Yep.
- Had a week off.**
- Yep.
- Started at the garage.**
- Yep.
- Do you remember your first day?**
- Yeah I fronted up in a pair of overalls, white overalls
- 24:30 because I was doing spare parts, petrol and those things and had no idea whatsoever what I was going to do. I knew the manager. He was in the volunteer fire brigade with my Dad and he was also in the band and the workshop manager was his father and they were both Lutherans so three of the workshop blokes were Lutherans to.
- 25:00 It was a bit of an 'in' thing that way but myself and the bloke in the lube were Catholics and the people who owned it were Church of England so there was a bit of mixture but with the manager, you got a bit of preference if you were Lutheran, but the priest used to bring his car there and it was pretty scary for a while, but I had to learn the parts
- 25:30 numbering system for Ford and I left there in 1966 but I can still tell that the part number for a Zephyr oil filter was 206E6731. Some things stick and you learnt the system. Ford part system were 6000 series whereas engine parts and 3000 was front suspension and so on so
- 26:00 you learnt things that way. 9000 I think was fuel systems and then they had an argument with Ford and went onto Chrysler and Masey Ferguson and I could never understand their system. It just wasn't as easy to learn as Fords. Masey Ferguson wasn't too bad and then eventually they went back to Fords. For four years there they didn't really have any

- 26:30 idea much of man management the way we do today. You very rarely got a word of praise and you had to record all the petrol sales and if you were out a dollar you were in deep trouble and I used to open the shop up and I'd sweep the floor and all this sort of stuff and they'd say,
- 27:00 "We'll send you on a course with Masey Ferguson to learn their part system." and that never ever come off and, "Cecil's in the tyre service. He's going to retire soon we'll send you to a course with Goodyear and you can take over the tyre service." Well that never happened. And I developed my own network of contacts through Ford and Masey Ferguson and the other garage across the road, so I got everything I wanted
- 27:30 pretty easily that way but never a word of praise and the boss came in one day and laughing about his son Doug who worked for a suit shop. How Doug had taken a sickie and gone down to Brisbane to do a medical for the army and I thought, "That's not a bad idea." and then National Service come along and I filled in my paperwork and I thought, "This would be good. Two years away." because we'd had one bloke from
- 28:00 Crows Nest and then another one and this bloke kept going AWL [Absent Without Leave] so many times they finally let him go and I wrote across the bottom of my form I would be happy to volunteer for National Service and it came back saying, "You have been indefinitely deferred." so I thought, "Bugger this." so I did what Doug did. I took a sickie and I went to Brisbane on the Greyhound [bus] and had a
- 28:30 medical and about a week and a half later the boss, someone must have been talking about army and it occurred him that I had taken the same day off that Doug had when he went down for his medical and he was pretty upset with that, that I would take a day off sick, but it was okay for his son to do it to his employer, and when I left there after four years they said, "We're sorry to see you go."
- 29:00 You really were the best employer we ever had in the spare parts job." and I used to do the stock control and all this but in four years they'd never mentioned it. They'd leave it until you go to say you were the best we've ever had there and no one else had stayed that long. The bloke after me did. He was in my class at school. He stayed there until they sold it out and then he went to Toowoomba and worked and now he's retired and lives back in Crows Nest.
- 29:30 Maybe a word or two or praise every now and again would have made a difference to my life and maybe this thing about, "Get a haircut by Monday or a new job." and then the army said, "Yes, come and talk." and signed up for six years and just kept on doing it from there.

What was your haircut?

It was relatively short back and sides because you would go to Mick French for a haircut

- 30:00 and this is one of the things about being a kid in Crows Nest. The big barber chair and he put a board across the arm rests and as a kid you sat on that board and he cut your hair according to your father's instructions. You knew when you were a big kid because you could sit in the seat itself. You didn't have to sit on the board, but until you could sit in the seat and making your own money, you still got his standard haircut
- 30:30 and that was short back and sides and that was the way the boss wanted it. Short back and sides. The way my hair is now just would have been too long for him, and of course you didn't want to conform so you joined the army and that was good, yeah.

What did the garage look like?

A big white building with a house on top. They lived upstairs. Big glass folding doors on the front with a big Ford and Mobil signs on it.

- 31:00 Four pumps out the front. The air hose and that sort of thing and then the lubritorium [pit] to the left of the main building. It was joined onto it. Workshop at the back of it about three or four bays of workshops and about 15 yards away was the tyre service and behind that was the panel beating workshop so it was a pretty big area.

How many blokes worked there?

- 31:30 There was the manager and myself in the spare parts and that sort of thing and a girl in the office and she worked with the boss's wife. The boss wandered around doing a bit of mechanising every now and again and getting in people's way so he built himself a caravan in the workshop and most of the money for that, most of the supplies were paid for by the garage to save him money. There were
- 32:00 twp in the tyre service. There was one full time and the other used to load up the old Mark II Zephyr for a farm service and he could be away from 6.00 in the morning and not be back until 6.00 at night and he would go right up as far as Yarromin and all that sort of thing so we pretty well had that business to ourselves around the Crows Nest area because there no one else could do that. We had three in the workshop.
- 32:30 Sometimes four. We had a young apprentice there. We called him 'Lightning' because he moved so slow and there was one and an apprentice in the panel-beating shop and they were really good. Do your car up and never know. I know once when we shot a hole in the side of a car by accident.

- 33:00 A mate was using my rifle you see and it had a telescopic sight on it and the centre of the sight is that far above the barrel and he is shooting across the ute and at that distance the bullets also below the scope so instead of going where it was supposed to go it went straight in through the canopy of the ute, through the inside skin and made a big bulge on the outside skin so we quickly went back
- 33:30 into Crows Nest and within an hour Rex had the dint out and touched up the paint and you never knew it was there. He was pretty handy.

What sort of cars mainly came into the garage?

They were old Zephyrs most of the time. Zephyrs and Customlines, and then from 1961 onwards they were a lot of Falcons around. That was when the Falcon was introduced and when the dam was being built up there, there were

- 34:00 all sorts of cars you know and the other garage which had a bigger area. It was a massive area under one roof. They were the Holden people, so they sold Holdens and Internationals and Bedfords and so on, but we even had some of their people come to us because a lot of people thought out mechanics were better and that was it.

So you said you had a Customline.

Yeah.

What did that look like?

- 34:30 Big and long and blue. It had a V8 motor in it and it was probably about 18ft long, about 5.5 m long and it was wide. You could practically lie down door to door on the back seat. That was handy. It was a magnificent motor car. Three on the tree you know, manual shift
- 35:00 on the column. Floor shifts were a bit unusually then in a normal family car. A lot of blokes used to put them in their own cars and a mate of mine had one and it was the first straight line gear shift. My brother had the first set of wide wheels on a car in Crows Nest and that was on an old '63 Holden. So we were at the forefront there I suppose yeah.

35:30 **Who taught you to drive?**

A bloke my Dad used to work with. Our yard was so big that when they would come back. He had a '49 Chev [Chevrolet] and about the same model International ute and they would be out cutting blocks of a Saturday and they'd come back and go to the pub for a couple of hours and come back home and I used to jump in whatever vehicle he had and drive it around the yard. There was that much space in the

- 36:00 yard so that's where I learned basically and then when we'd go shooting we'd get on some of the back roads and he'd let me drive then even though I was underage, and I turned 17 on a Wednesday, got my learner's permit the same day, and I got my driver's licence on the Saturday without having driven anything. So the same cop knew what had been
- 36:30 going on and I had to drive up to the shop to get the paper, went in and checked the mail at the post office on a Saturday morning because he used to do mail deliveries on a Saturday, took him to the butcher shop and he said, "Might go up and have a look and see who's at the golf club." And the golf club was on top of a little hill and it had a gravel driveway and the bugger made me stop half way up the driveway and take off again without using a handbrake and I drove him back to
- 37:00 the police station and he wrote it out so I got my car, truck and a tractor licence all on the same day. You could only do that in a country town.

When you went to work after you left high school did you, would you have preferred to go to work or would you have preferred to go on and do more study?

Money was scarce so I wanted to get out of school and go to work.

- 37:30 I was on seven quid a week I think. When did decimal currency start? Round about then. \$14.00 a week I started off on and that seemed a hell of a lot of money and that meant that occasionally I'd buy food and take home to ease a bit of the pressure at home. So it was good that way. It was a thing and it meant I could
- 38:00 get a decent rifle and put a telescope on it and you didn't miss as often so that was more food too and as I said before we made a quid out of the shooting. I really didn't want to go onto high school like after Crows Nest.

You mentioned to us before that there were quite a few people who had served in World War I and World War II. Was there much talk about that?

No.

- 38:30 Very little. We had a funeral up there last year. A bloke named Stan Gleeson had died now I went to the convent school with his son John and we used to fight a bit but I never ever realised that Stan had even been in the army because nobody talked about it.

- 39:00 He was with either the 25th Battalion or 9th Battalion in New Guinea and they fought up through New Guinea and into the islands and he was a machine gunner and somebody did get him talking about it once fighting the Japanese and he said, "You know, one morning I killed 100 of them before breakfast." But it was never talked about and the bloke that lived across the road from us,
- 39:30 in our first house there in Crows Nest. I marched there for Anzac Day there one year and you know, beard and a bit of long hair, and he's standing beside me and I said, "How's it going?" and he said, "Good. Ned Talbutt." And I said, "Yeah, Bob Lange." and he said, "Bob, I didn't recognise you." The hair was down to the shoulder and the beard was there and he'd been in the army in the Second World War and Dad
- 40:00 had no hope. He had a broken hip when he was 12 months old and he had no hope of getting in. I think two of his brothers were. I don't know if the other one was. One of them is still alive over at Cannon Hill was up through the islands and I spent a bit of time with him and I'm getting his war medals when he dies. He's got cancer.
- 40:30 He said, "The way it's going, he could die of natural causes before the cancer kills him." but I've got some photos here of the signing of the Japanese surrender in the Second World War off the islands on the HMAS Daimantina and he was, he tells me on the Daimantina that day. They were going out to sign the surrender and somebody said, "We'd better take a medic in case something goes wrong. Lange you're doing nothing. Come on." So he was there and the photographer was there
- 41:00 and the photographer made copies of the photographs taken on that day for all the people that were there.

We might just.

Tape 3

- 00:30 **So in your school years had you thought about what you might like to do in the future?**

I had visions at one stage I might like to join the air force but then I was told because of my glasses I couldn't fly an aeroplane so that ruled out the air force and at 16 I really didn't think about it. About doing anything long term but

- 01:00 around 1964 there were in wintertime a lot of cadet camps up around Crows Nest and I got to meet a lot of the soldiers there. There were some regular soldiers and some CMF [Citizens Military Forces] ones. Three of them I still now. A little CMF medical corporal who joined the regular army and we kept running into each other of the years and he was up in tropical
- 01:30 trials I think in Innisfail or Tully when his father died and I was with army welfare and so I went to the airport and took him home and helped him through that and the other bloke joined the regular army and I run into him a few times. He was in RMC [Royal Military College] at Duntroon and he just transferred from infantry to ordinance and he was a warrant officer down there. He was actually the
- 02:00 person who lowered the flag in Saigon for the last time in the old Free Will Headquarters, which is where I worked, and I've got a photograph of him doing it. It's in one of the books I've got here, and the other bloke, I've run into him a few times and he stills lives up here in Toowoomba. These three guys were with the people who sort of impressed me with the army and part of it was, "Gee, they've got a nice uniform and the girls like them."
- 02:30 but part of it was that the people themselves. They had that sort of, you know, they were corporals and sergeants and warrant officers and they had this confidence that a lot of other people didn't have, and I was pretty confident working in the garage once I got used to it with the contacts with the transport companies and all this sort of stuff and nothing like these people had.

Can you remember the

- 03:00 **first time you heard about the Vietnam War?**

There was a little bit on it and when we sent the advisors over and that was the first and the next big thing you heard about it was Long Tan and that was in '66 and that really impressed me that these blokes had done something like that and then the National Service thing had come out.

- 03:30 The one bloke from Crows Nest that had been called up. He wasn't I suppose a local. He worked in the bank. He lives up there now though and he went to Vietnam and that raised a bit of interest in it and I was probably the first one in Crows Nest since the Second War to join the army. There were a couple after me. A bloke I went to school with ended up joining but he joined in Sydney.
- 04:00 He's now a funeral director down the south side and I think Long Tan was the thing and of course, the adventure and the good looking uniform. I think that's really what did it and the need at that stage to

get out of Crows Nest because I could see there I was going nowhere in Crows Nest. The people,

04:30 a lot of the people were going nowhere. There's nothing wrong with living there all your life if that's what you want but I wanted more.

What sort of education had you had in regards to Australia's involvement in World War I and World War II?

Not a hell of a lot. Uncle Jack never talked much about it. I used to read a lot of books about it. No one

05:00 had ever sort of taught me about it but I read a fair bit. I've got a book here that I found again last week and I don't know where I've put it. I put it somewhere so I'd know where it was called The Jap Was Thrashed and that was written towards the or just after the war about how the Japs were beaten from New Guinea and back up and I found another book once about an anti-tank unit

05:30 and a cousin of mine was a sergeant in that and it talked about their history and that had me interested. Of course they were the one and threepenny little comics that you'd buy and all the marine ones and then all the British ones and with that you see that was all the adventure and you'd read

06:00 them but nobody ever got hurt.

Did you play war games?

A little yeah. We had to stop throwing grenades because people were getting hit by rocks. We played cowboys and Indians. War. Not a lot of difference.

Were you ping-pong each other with air rifles or did you stick?

No I only ever shot one kid with an air rifle and that was really accidental.

06:30 I meant to hit the ground beside him and something went wrong and I hit him in the back of the leg in the calf. He didn't really know what had happened. Yeah. We used to do silly things though. I know at one stage this kid lived across the road was trying to impress his girlfriend and I was shooting down the creek line

07:00 and I'd followed this wallaby up this other little creek and here's Patrick there at what used to be the old butter factory pump hole with his girlfriend see and he's up on the top of the rocks with her and I'm down at the bottom and it's about a 20ft drop and he said, "You think you're a good shot." and I said, "Yeah." "Bet you can't shoot a stick out of my hand."

07:30 So I did. About 30 yards away I suppose, and he's standing up with a stick about a 1m or so long, holding it up in front of this big tree and I started at the outside and I took about six inches off at a time and when it got back to about a foot from his hand he'd had enough. You know a big telescope on the rifle and I back then I was a really good shot. It certainly impressed the girl.

08:00 She wouldn't talk to either of us for about a week. She thought it was stupid and it probably was, but it was a gum tree so the bullet wasn't going to bounce off it. We knew it would go in there but you could do things like that and I used to zero my rifle on the creek bank with pieces of chalk. You'd fire a shot first of all into a soft rock, then you would

08:30 zero it back onto that same bullet mark and then you would walk down and stick up half a dozen pieces of chalk and probably 50 yards you would get rid of the chalk. So we could shoot pretty well.

So that first time when you thought about joining the air force, did you know where that came from?

Aeroplanes. I wanted to fly planes. I used to see them fly over. An old DC3 [DC3 Douglas Dakota bomber]. "Wow." And there as a kid we visited Brisbane once

09:00 because my grandfather lived there and we went out to the airport and the pilot let us walk through a DC3. You know this is magnificent. I've got to fly one of these and that's what sparked the air force and the flying bit in the air force.

And when was the first time you ever flew in a plane?

At recruit training. We got a break half way through it and I flew home for a few days.

09:30 The first time ever and I can't even remember what sort it was. I might have been something like an Electra [Lockheed Electra bomber] or something like that. It was a four engine plane and, "Wow, this is really something."

The day you took a sickie to enquire about joining up. How did you get down? Did you go to Brissie [Brisbane] for that?

Yeah. I got a ride into Toowoomba and then I went down in the Greyhound

10:00 because they paid for it and it was the initial interview and the medical and if you passed the medical. You did the medical first and if you passed the medical you went back and did the written exam.

Can you remember much about that whole process?

Not a lot. The written exam I didn't think was too bad and they were mainly logic type questions and they were recruiting pretty quickly

10:30 for Vietnam and there's a Dutchmen I met there on that day. He owns the pub at Yamba now just north of Rockhampton and also owns the motel at Emu Park and he's leased the pub out and I spent some time with him before Christmas. We've been mates all that time. We shared a room at Kapooka

11:00 and one of the other guys my number was 120003 and Barry was 120002 and he's still got a bloody shirt of mine that he took off the line in Kapooka and I've got one of his and I went to his birthday party last year to, but there's not just too many left, but there's a few.

You mentioned the National Service scheme

11:30 **had started up. What was your understanding of that?**

Go away for two years come back and go back to your job and that's it. It sounded like a good idea and I thought it was great particularly for kids from the country to give them a chance to see something and I believed what the government was saying about the need to be in Vietnam. You know, the old domino principle. If they take Vietnam then Malaya is there

12:00 and the Australians have been fighting the Communist in Korea and then Malaya and so forth. The CTs [Communist Terrorists] in Malaya, the Communist Terrorists in Malaya and then it's just a step down the islands and then they are down here. Well we can't let that happened. So I believed in it and I believed in National Service and I would have been happy to go and do it. I thought it was a good thing.

Was any part of joining the army wanting to follow in

12:30 **the Anzac tradition sort of thing?**

Part of it. There was a perceived glamour of it all and the big adventure of it all. It was all going to be a big adventure and nobody was really going to get hurt and that was a big part of it because you could see yourself in your own mind marching off to war and then coming home victorious and all this sort of thing. But reality is different isn't it.

13:00 **So what was the time period between going down on the first occasion and doing the medical and that and actually getting the word that you are going to go in?**

I think the medical was probably July/August and I got called down in October. I think it was the 16th or 17th of October that I got sworn in.

And what did your parents

13:30 **think of that?**

They were happy and didn't know how my grandfather would take it. He wanted me to be a school teacher like one of his other grandsons and I didn't really want to do that but he turned out he was pretty happy when I joined the army.

So what about the day you had to throw the job in?

I told them and I walked into the boss

14:00 on the Monday morning and I said, "I got the letter Friday. I've been accepted for the army and I've got to be down there on the 15th. So I'll have to finish up the week before that." And he wasn't impressed. "I didn't think you'd get in." because his son didn't get in. Doug was a cricketer, a footballer and all this sort of stuff and I think he'd gone onto another school in Toowoomba. Probably Church of England Grammar School,

14:30 fit and everything and he didn't wear glasses and he failed medically and I couldn't understand that, and he didn't think I'd get in because Doug didn't get in. But they did some funny things. A mate of mine got called in for his medical for National Service. Failed it because he had flat feet. They said you'd never be able to wear boots and march. He worked on the dam, building the dam. He wore steel capped work boots all the time.

15:00 We used to go fishing, shooting and we'd run through the bush with a .303 [.303 Lee Enfield rifle] at times and he could leave me for dead time and distance wise and they said, "You'd never be able to wear the boots." so there's some funny things and he would have liked to have gone to but he was a big confident bloke and he would have done really well in two years. He's bugged now.

15:30 He's got diabetes.

And besides joining the army did you have any idea at that stage what corps you would like to go into?

None at all. They talked a bit about corps at the enlistment seminar thing and I thought, "Well infantry

sounds good because that's where it all is and you find out afterwards it isn't but they are the ones that get out there and do the fighting." and then someone said, "Well you won't get in glasses into infantry."

- 16:00 and that wasn't quite right either. But come time for corps allocation one of my instructors was a service corps bloke. Paul Jule and he impressed me pretty much about service corps and service corps had clerks and drivers and we looked after the cooks and the stewards and all this sort of stuff
- 16:30 and I thought ordinance corps would be all right. The stores thing. A big corps and all that and I put down those as my options and they put me in service corps. Yeah I didn't really mind it all that much but there's no glamour in being a clerk. But you've got to live with that.

So how did they send you down to Kapooka?

Train to Sydney

- 17:00 and we all had haircuts before we left and we went to what was called Northern Command Personnel Depot in Brisbane and then we went down to Eastern Command Personnel Depot near Sydney. We were there for a couple of days and that was my first sight of Sydney and we were allowed out there for about four hours one afternoon and I thought, "Oh my God. This is too big for me." and had another haircut and then
- 17:30 I think we all got on buses and then went to Kapooka or it could have been train to Wagga. I don't actually remember that but I remember getting off a bus at Kapooka. "My God what have I got into?" There were people running everywhere and marching and carrying on.

And was that sort of lead up stage before you got to Kapooka the way you were treated? How was that?

Good yeah. Actually, Barry had

- 18:00 I think he might have been school cadets or something and he taught us how to stand at ease and stand at attention before we got down there so we were half a lesson in front and we had some troopers getting discharged and he used to say, "Watch these troopers with their foot drill. They do it really well." Because we were on parade with them in the morning and, "This isn't too bad." but then at Kapooka, but they're yelling and that. What they do
- 18:30 and it took me a while to realise this. You get 30 individuals of, 33 individuals and I think 10-12 weeks we were there then and they have to get the individuality out of you so that you all do the same thing at the same time and once you become a team and then they could develop the individuality back into you
- 19:00 and the whole idea of the drill apart from looking good was get you to react instinctively to a shouted command or even a word because later than can save your life. And I used to tell the Army Reserve recruits at Wacol when I was out there that's what it's all about. It's not just to bastardise you and we never had any bastardisation at Kapooka.
- 19:30 Half our platoon was Nashos [National Servicemen] and there was usual putting shit on each other but our officer was a Nasho and one of our corporals was a Nasho. The other two the bombardier and the other corporal were Regs [Regular Army]. The Nashos would say, "You bastards joined to get a job, we came in to do one." You know and little things like that but there was never any distinction between the Regs and the Nashos.
- 20:00 I don't know what the rest of Kapooka was like at 5 Platoon A Company there was nothing like that. That was really good.

Did you notice blokes started to buddy up before you even got to Kapooka?

Yeah. The six of us from Brisbane did. There was Barry and myself, Marty, Kenny and Kevin and Moses. Moses was another Dutchman, Robert Van der Loch his name was. He'd been a

- 20:30 merchant seamen and so the four of us Marty, Barry, myself and Moses shared a room at Kapooka and Moses got top soldier in the platoon and he just wanted to go to the infantry and kill people. They put him in service corps and tried to make him a clerk and about two weeks into the clerical course out of bed at 6.00 for PT [Physical Training], Moses said, "No get stuffed." "What?"
- 21:00 He was gone by lunchtime. Haven't heard of him since but the other two guys as I said I still know where they are and we talk and we visit. I don't really encourage too many visitors.

Can you remember the feeling coming across the bus as you got closer to Kapooka change?

Very nervous. A bit excited

- 21:30 but I think more nervous. A bit scared more than anything else. What's it going to be like? It wasn't as bad as what I thought. The PT was probably the worse bit. They made you do things in PT that were no earthly help to you. You'd do what they called in-steps. You had to jump up and grab the bar like that and then you had to throw yourself back so that the in step of your foot touch the bar.
- 22:00 It's got no value to anything you are going to be called on to do in the army but I had to do four of them.

That was the hardest thing I did. four of them. Everything else was quite all right. I was reasonably fit. I got a bit bugged coming up the last two in our 25 mile march and this big pig farmer from Dubbo somewhere. John Smith. Magnificent bloke.

- 22:30 National Servicemen. He was a funny bugger. He only wanted to go to artillery and be a PTI [Physical Training Instructor] and he. You'd be on the range and his scores were probably better than average and when he looked at it he'd say, "That was a bit off." and I said, "What not good enough?" and he said, "No. I don't want to end up infantry. I thought I'd aimed off enough." And he didn't want to be a grunt he wanted
- 23:00 to be a PTI. He was a big man and well over 6 foot and the PT instructor was talking something about chin ups and Smith said, "Is it harder with two hands?" because he was doing his chin ups one handed. The strength of the man, and I hooked onto his back pack coming up the final hill. Our platoon for some reason or other clicked as far as drill went
- 23:30 and at the end of that 23 mile march we had a five minute break at the top of the hill and we marched down the hill onto the parade ground and Peter Vincent, the platoon commander, second lieutenant, "5 Platoon halt." and it was bang, one bang. After all that and the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] was an Irish staff sergeant named Mick Flynn and
- 24:00 he watched us and he said, "How many hours have you had them lying down Sir?" "They had a five minute break at the top of the hill." And he said, "I've never seen any platoon stop so well." And as you progressed in your last couple of weeks in recruit training you were used on the march out parades and we did our first one at five or six weeks and the reviewing officer thought it was us
- 24:30 marching out. Coordinated rifle drill and the whole platoon without a sound being made that you could hear 10 yards away would start off at the ground arms. And you would be given the order, "Ground arms." From the ground arms so what you do you go down and you take up arms so you are at the order and then shoulder and then you change to the other shoulder and then you go back again and you do a present and we practised and
- 25:00 practises this and at the end of it when you went down the grounds and you came back everybody's foot hit the ground at the same time. I don't know why because at that stage there were only 32 of us left. Thirty-one maybe, but everyone just clicked. Our rifle drill. They used to use us to demonstrate to other platoons. Some of them had been there two weeks longer than us. That pissed a few off but we
- 25:30 were good and when we left we didn't have a march out parade because there wasn't a platoon advanced enough to march us out. So it was good and I used to love that rifle drill and you really learnt to flick it from the ground up to your shoulder and what they would make us do to get it right. Instead of you flick it up and bring your arm across to catch it while the right hand catches the pistol grip, we'd
- 26:00 flick it up and left hand come across to catch it and right arm out parallel to the ground so you only had the one arm to catch it with and you'd flick it up and you'd keep this arm still and you'd flick it up and catch it by the pistol grip to make sure it went to the right height but that was the way the drill instructors were.

Did any of the blokes in the platoon have problems?

Yeah one bloke used to jerk off lot at night and that became a problem.

- 26:30 Somebody eventually hit him to stop him doing it and there was another fellow that wouldn't tub but we looked after that. We got the Solvo [soap] and the sand soap and all that and got him in the shower one night and there were two blokes there. One had been in the air force at one stage. He was an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] which is
- 27:00 nothing. You are in for a certain amount of time and you get that title, but he was one of I suppose the leaders to a few people in the platoon and he was going to go into engineers and there was another guy there who was a bit of a smart arse and he used to pick on other guys occasionally but this ex-air force bloke sorted him out one night
- 27:30 and there was no more of that. So you know when you are looking at 10 or 12 weeks that we were there. Very little trouble. Nobody went AWL and overall although there were a couple of smart arses who were smart arses all the way through they weren't really any trouble to anybody so we did pretty well.

How long was it before we got any privileges?

- 28:00 That first leave I suppose which was about the seven or eight week mark - six week mark I think it was and then you are allowed home for a few days and if you weren't on duty and some sort of restriction you'd probably get Saturday afternoon and Saturday night off until midnight to go into Wagga and you were allowed to go to the boozer at night. I don't think anyone drank too much. The beer was shithouse. It was two Sol Kent or something like that
- 28:30 and it wasn't real flash. I've only ever had one beer worse than that and that was Max in Rockhampton and that's why, well I drank a lot of spirits up there because if you couldn't get into town for XXXX [beer] you didn't want to drink Max. The privileges were good but the people in Wagga didn't like you

because you had to go in there in uniform and your short hair would

29:00 have given you away anyhow but we were allowed to have our cars there after the half time break and a lot of blokes had civvies in their car but it didn't make any difference. You were the only one with that haircut and there were occasionally fights with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] recruits from the other side and there were occasionally fights with civilians but I didn't particularly like Wagga or the people so I only went there twice and that was about it.

And what were the lines like then back at Kapooka?

Good.

29:30 They weren't all that old. Before I got there only a couple of months before they were living in the old igloo style huts. 'Silver City' they used to call it and when we got there we were still doing picket duties over there at night and you were armed with a pick handle and instructed not to beat up on the wallabies because they were pretty tame but we were in the new lines, the new barracks and they

30:00 were pretty good. four to a room. Your own bloody wardrobe and it was built in and it wasn't a tin one and your toilets and showers were in the building. You didn't have to go out to another building for your showers so it was pretty good. It wasn't far from the mess hall and the only thing that they were really, it was a tradition thing. If someone dropped a plate or a bunch of plates

30:30 in the mess hall it would hit the floor and then there would be silence and then everyone would yell out, "Hurray. Oh shit!" and the commandant or the CO [Commanding Officer] put down a thing to say that we weren't allowed to do that anymore because there were so many recruits there it was so loud that the officers married quarters were within distance and they decided that we shouldn't do that.

What about birthdays and

31:00 **things like in the mess?**

No never really worried about it.

What was the food like?

I thought it was pretty good. There was plenty of it and this is I suppose the first introduction of man management or to personnel, human relations because if you went through there grumpy

31:30 the cooks knew that. If you, "G'day mate." and there are other recruits on the serving line to so you got feed pretty well if you treated them right.

Can you tell us about getting issued with all your stuff when you first got there?

There's a saying in the army. "We've got three sizes. Too big, too small and just right. If it's too big it will shrink. If it's too small it will stretch. If it fits you give it back, and it'll be too big or too small

32:00 for someone else." And that was it, and my slouch hat was too big but that was the size the bloke in the Q [Quartermaster] store said would fit me, so that's what I took. You know and your greens [jungle camouflage uniform] weren't all the same size but that didn't matter. Swap them with other people and if at the end of the day if you haven't got three or four sets that don't fit you then

32:30 we'll look at changing them. I ended up with clothes that fit. The boots were the thing. The boots were ankle black and black gaiters and looked shocking those bloody gaiters because we were never allowed to use the lackey bands and pull the trousers down over them. They had to be tucked in and once you got out of recruit training it wasn't too bad of course but there it had to be their way and their way was God's way

33:00 and that was about it. But the issues you know it was just a production line and the same with needles. You are all standing there outside RAP [Regimental Aid Post] with your shirts off and your arm out like that so you could get the needle and sometimes you had both arms out because you were going to get one in each arm and we are standing there one day and this bloke came out with blood pouring down his bloody arm.

33:30 He bleed pretty well from the needle and the bloke behind me fainted. You know most of them were pretty good and some of the nurses were good and on Christmas Day in 1966 this sexy female voice came over the PA [Public Address] system. "Hello all you sexy little recruits out there. How are you and merry Christmas."

34:00 We never ever saw who it was but it sounded nice. I learned you can't pick the face by the voice because I was in Canberra and the girls on the switch there used to talk sexy to you and they look like Grindecella and the three sisters ugly you know. It was different. You never put a face

34:30 to a voice.

How do you think growing up in the country shooting and all that helped you as a soldier?

It helped with the shooting and the weapon handling because we had a fairly good idea about weapon safety. We had one bloke shot up in Crows Nest and that woke everybody up and he didn't die but he

had a pretty fair scare from his lower belly up to the top of the ribs.

35:00 So it was good that way. You were used to handling fire arms. But we were the first platoon to go through there that used the F100 machine gun and that was a shit of a weapon and the instructors were pretty well learning it themselves as they were teaching up. I enjoyed firing it. It would fire bursts or a single shot depending on the trigger pressure but it was highly overrated as a killing

35:30 weapon. Sometimes on a really sunny day you could actually see the sun glint off the projectile. It's not real quick.

Shall we stop there and chase the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK away. What was some of the problems we had with the F100s?

Well this is only my opinion. I didn't think they were a terribly safe weapon. A bloke I knew in Saigon actually

36:00 leaned over a balcony and accidentally dropped his and it fell about 20 ft I suppose and 30 rounds fired off so that sort of a little bit worrying and the other thing was the breach block in there was all one solid piece of machine steel so you are only talking about a 9mm round about that long and the

36:30 recoil was what had to push that bolt back and it was too me just too big and too heavy. It could have been made probably smaller and say with a stronger return, a stronger return spring because it had a fixed firing pin so there was no double action of the bolt coming forward and seizing the round and then firing. It pushed it forward and fired it when it was fully seated and that was it.

37:00 Then it had to push this monstrous great bolt back. We are talking that long and that diameter and to me that was just too heavy and I saw reports of VC [Viet Cong] killed with these things but the reports noted that there were marks on the bodies that indicated that some bullets had hit them and not penetrated. Now a five yard, 10 yard

37:30 they would have been all right but anything over that I think forget them and they had a magazine that sat on top so that worried me because of the possibility of the rounds could fall straight through if you something went wrong and you had the breach block open so I didn't like them as far as that sort of thing went.

What about the SLR [Self Loading Rifle]?

Loved them. They were good.

38:00 They booted a bit until you got used to them and once you got used to them a once you got your gas setting back where it should be and you made sure your gas plug was put in the right way then there was nothing you couldn't do with them. They weren't a terribly accurate weapon over 300m because of the way they moved but they were a magnificent piece of gear and the sights were designed for bush shooting

38:30 so they were effective like that.

Besides the drill that you mentioned and obviously weapons training was there anything else at Kapooka that you really got a buzz out of?

Not really. I liked going on the parades and we used to do guard duty on the front gate and the CO was Colonel Dunston and he actually ended up

39:00 being the chief of Defence Force staff and then the governor of South Australia and I saluted him once as he came through the gate in his own car and he stopped and said, "Thank you son, but take the biro out of your right hand before you salute." because I had been writing down the rego [registration] numbers as they came through and the biro was still there. But he was good. "Shit, I saw the CO today and he spoke to me."

39:30 And that was it and of course we all smoked then and Marty made a killing out of that because his father was a travelling salesman see and he used to get all these European Malboro and Benson & Hedges and all this stuff and Marty would get them from this father and he'd sell them to the recruits and the staff so he did all right but it was always a bit of an ego thing when the instructor come and bummed a cigarette off you because they weren't supposed to do that, they weren't allowed to that

40:00 but it was just something that made you feel good and you see these people had learned about motivation and all that and the army was expert in this, in adult training. We learned by one or two or a combination of three different means. Some people learned by seeing things, some by hearing, some by doing. The army did all three.

40:30 Watch the demonstration and they would show you what they did and then they would explain what they did and then you would imitate what they did or they would say, "On the command such and such you do this." And they'd tell you what's going to happen and then they'd show you and then you'd do it. Then they would do fault correction so no matter which was your preferred way of learning they

41:00 catered for it and with adult training as well they gave you a reason for everything you learned so you weren't just learning things, apart from PT with insteps. You weren't just learning for the sake of them

teaching you something. Every lesson there was a reason for what you are going to learn and that's a great motivational tool.

We might just...

Tape 4

00:31 **Was it disappointing not having your own marching our parade seeing you had been involved in all the other ones?**

It was but it was also good for your ego because you knew that you were the best there and no one else was good enough to do it so it was good that way and when everybody left and there were three of us I think,

01:00 four of us left there because they didn't want us in Puckapunyal until after the end of the month or something. We were going to be too late to join one clerical course and they were going to leave us at Kapooka for three months until the next one started and that was good because you were no longer a recruit. You were a private and you ate in the staff section of the mess and you could look at all these recruits walking past so that was pretty good.

01:30 **What sort of duties did they have you doing in that time?**

Just working in the orderly room that's it and there wasn't much to that either. We weren't there for very long because they had a couple of exercises on up in Shoalwater Bay and they needed some general duty staff for that so they trained us down to Seymour and

02:00 then we got on a bus I think down to Tullamarine and got on a plane and flew us up to Rockhampton and put us on a truck and took us out to Shoalwater Bay and we were there for about three months. That was different.

When was it that you actually made your corps selections?

You tried to in the last say two or three weeks of recruit training and then the person from the posting cell in the records office in Melbourne would come up and you'd be marched in

02:30 and technically you were allowed to discuss with him but they had probably made their mind up already and you would tell him what corps you wanted and if you weren't going to go there he would tell you why and that was really about it. And they said to me, "What corps do you want?" and I said, "Service corps or ordinance." And they said, "You can go to service corps." You marched out and that was it. It was just that quick

03:00 and I was pretty happy with that.

So you did your exercise in Shoalwater before you went down to Pucka [Puckapunyal] for your course?

Yeah we were general staff and that meant you were a back man for officers and you worked in the kitchen and things like that and that's where I learned never to upset the kitchen staff because they are a couple of officers there that we spat in their meals and things like this

03:30 so...There was one young pilot who you know seemed like a real nice bloke until he accused us of knocking off his cigarettes but it was a brand of cigarettes that none of us smoked and we used to spit shine his boots for him because we thought he was a great bloke and after that we just cleaned them with a rough brush. You know, and some of the stuff that went in his meals, you know.

04:00 It was common to spit in it and one bloke, he really upset one of the cooks, so he blew his nose into his meal and mixed it all up and the guy was eating this because he never knew, you see, so you never upset the kitchen people, and I've always remembered that and I've always looked after them.

So what was your corps training like down in Puckapunyal?

04:30 Most of it was good. We had one instructor that was a mongrel and he actually beat up one of the Nashos and this bloke had been a school teacher and he was going to go from private straight to sergeant and off to Port Moresby as a school teacher or teacher for the army on the army education courses, and this bloke took a dislike to him for some reason and one night at a

05:00 few drinks give him a flogging but sort of wasn't terribly well respected in the first place, that instructor. But very important lesson there was never become a staff sergeant if you are an admin clerk, because two of the sergeants that we had there - this was 1967, I met seven or eight years later

05:30 when they were being discharged, and they were still staff sergeants. It was a hard rank sometimes to get out of. You were between a sergeant and a warrant officer and too many people seemed to stay there. I was lucky I sort of skipped that.

I meant to ask you before when you at Kapooka were any of the instructors veterans of Korea or World War II?

I think the acting CSM Mick

06:00 Flynn had been in every war we ever had and he probably started half of them. But he was terribly Irish. Magnificent voice but he was a veteran of a few wars and the CO was. Colonel Dunstan and there were a few others around but not a hell of a lot that we sort of saw. There were probably a few in company headquarters

06:30 and battalion headquarters but at that level we didn't mix socially that's for sure, so we never ever knew, but at corps training with people wearing a polyester uniform, they wore their medal ribbons and so on so you knew and there were a hell of a lot of them.

And were you guys at corps training wearing jungle greens or your polys?

Both. They would tell us

07:00 what they wanted us to wear and that's what we did and I think every week there would be a centre parade and we would wear polyesters for that and that was okay.

And what sort of things were you learning down there?

Oh typing was one of them and that was a bugger a thing. You had to be able to type at 25 words per minute and I barely

07:30 made it and then after that I did a typing course and I got up to 47 words a minute and that surprised the hell out of...We learnt the registration of filing and documentation. The in and outwards of paperwork and how to look up a file number, what the numbering system was. We learnt military law. We learnt how to type out a charge report and of course, we all became barrack room lawyers

08:00 and there was that. We learned the clerical or admin [administration] side of rationing and we learned pay, and I can't remember off-hand anything else and we learned how to use the Gestetner Machine [photo copier machine]. Bloody ink everywhere and we learned how to do amendments to law manuals and you see we had military board

08:30 instructions then and we had army routine orders and everything related back to the Army Act but under the Army Act we had Army Military Regulations Orders and everything was written under the Army Act and everything else worked down the line from there so you learned all that and you know some of it was hard and some of it was really easy.

How different were the blokes treated at corps training

09:00 **as opposed to basic training?**

Very different. Yeah, because they accepted that you had had that corps training and you were expected to be that little bit more of a soldier you know and there was no restrictions on going to the boozer [bar] at night as long as you were at work the next day and you could do it and your room was clean and tidy and you were dressed properly there wasn't much so it

09:30 was a hell of a lot different.

Where did you blokes go for leave?

Seymour occasionally but Melbourne was just down the road and we had two blokes on the clerical course with us who just came home from Vietnam and they were being retrained as claim and one of them had an XM ['64 XM Ford Falcon] so that's about a '64 Falcon, two door

10:00 and we used to duck down to Melbourne for a just a hamburger or a couple of beers sometimes during the week and one Friday night we ended up in a pub down at Port Melbourne and we were in uniform because your hair was a fraction longer and you had a corps badge on not a recruit badge and you had a Langer [name badge] and all the other stuff that goes with it and this pub was just like Coronation Street and we walked

10:30 in there and this old Pommy bird, "Aye our boys are here. The army's here. Move back from the bar you bastards and let our boys get a beer and that was it and we went back to the flat of one of these old dears and we got a sleep on the lounge and when I left she gave me a, I've still got the record here somewhere, a LP record [long-playing phonograph record] you know and they were just really pleased to see us

11:00 and that was what I'd seen in 1964 in Crows Nest at the cadet camps. The acceptance the soldiers got so it was good that way.

What was the big music at the time that you followed?

Always a country western fan. A little bit of rock n roll back then. Roy Orbison was big and Col Joy was big too but of course Slim Dusty and Tex Morton

11:30 were heroes of mine too and Buddy Williams and I had all the 78 albums at home and country music was most of it.

What time of year were you in Kapooka?

October through to January.

What about when you were in Pucka?

From May, June, July, August.

How did you find the cold?

Bloody freezing,

12:00 aye. You know you'd go outside and they had this wattle there and not a wattle tree more of a wattle bush and 6.00 in the morning the sun is just starting to come up and the frost is everywhere and this bush was silver. Of course a couple of hours later it was all golden. I've never been so bloody cold. I suppose in Canberra it

12:30 got cold. We were living in the old style huts. Not igloos, but First World War style huts down where the old recruit training battalion used to be and they were cold. You know I think they even gave us an extra blanket and most of us used to wear a tracksuit to bed. You know at Kapooka we were all sleeping at most in a pair of jocks but in wintertime down there

13:00 you saved yourself precious time by sleeping in your tracksuit and your socks so all you had to do was get up in the morning and pull your running shoes on and go to PT and you know that was good but it was cold and you're trying to type and your fingers are frozen and the rain. South of Puckapunyal is Mt Hickey and they used to say if you could see Mt Hickey, it's going to rain. If you can't see it, it's already bloody raining,

13:30 and years later as part of a promotion course we climbed Mt Hickey and it was raining at the bottom, it was sunshine half way up and it was snow at the top and that's in the space of four hours. So Puckapunyal in the winter time is not my favourite place.

It must get cold in Crows Nest at times there does it?

Yeah. As a kid

14:00 you know the one tap inside the house was quite often frozen in the wintertime. We had some magnificent frosts and the westerly winds of course up there hit you. You feel that, and in wintertime too, we always seemed to be cold because we couldn't afford good winter clothes. The army dressed you a little bit better I suppose for winter time.

14:30 All this time you were away, the first time you were away from home what was the correspondence like going to home?

Good. Yeah good. I got letters from about four or five different girls around Crows Nest as well as my family and these were girls that I hadn't been involved with just girls I knew and that was great that they thought enough just to write to make you feel better because even though you are in the middle of 30 blokes and you

15:00 were mates with the blokes sharing your room you still get lonely. So I got good mail there. I got good mail in Pucka. In Vietnam it slowed down a bit but generally it was all right.

At what stage of the game did you know that the chances of you going to Vietnam were pretty good?

When I was in Shoalwater Bay. It's one of my poems.

15:30 I met a bloke up there Colonel Cook and he was called the deputy director of military training. Now straight out of recruit training I was scared shitless of anything with a stripe or more and when you are working as a batman and you wake these guys up at 6.00 in the morning with coffee and you know lieutenant colonels and above because no one else got a cup of coffee with their wake up and you get a full

16:00 colonel in a pair of thongs and shorty pyjamas walking down the slope from his tent and say, "Bob can I get another cup of coffee?" you lose the fear and the awe. Colonel Cook sat down on a bloody log with me one morning and asked me about me, "Who are you? Where are you from? What do you want to do?" So I told him and I said, "I'm going back to Pucka and I'm going to do this clerks course and I'd like to be posted

16:30 back to Brisbane and when I've done 12 months in the army I think I would like to be posted to Vietnam." And he said, "Well what do you think about Vietnam?" and I said, "Well I think it's good. I think we should be there." And he said, "Okay, write all your details down and that on a piece of paper and give it to me." I tell people about that and they said, "Oh bullshit." Well I did my corps training and I came home then for my grandfather's funeral and went back and did the typing course

- 17:00 and I was posted to 26 Company at Wacol here in Brisbane. Unfortunately they were in Shoalwater Bay. I got into Brisbane and that night I was on the rocky rail going back to Rockhampton and I joined 26 Company in Shoalwater Company and they were raised to go to Vietnam and I told people about this and what the colonel had said and, "That was just luck."
- 17:30 Anyways we were camped at the end of the Plains Airstrip at Rockhampton and the OC was a Major Chris Anderson. Not very well liked but very particular about things and almost too pedantic at times but he would make us do PT every morning and we would run around the airstrip with our arms like this and people called us Christophoson's caribous.
- 18:00 The 2IC [Second in Command] was a Captain Colin Windfield. A real nice bloke. I've run into him a few times since then as a lieutenant colonel and he turns up for PT one morning with all these BOU signs so he was Captain Bou Bou and the CSM was McNichol Bou or something like that and we had our name with BOU after it
- 18:30 and we all fronted up on parade for PT with these signs so Christophoson and he made us wear them until lunchtime and he ran us an extra three or four kms that day to. We came back to Brisbane and had a few days off and I went back to Wacol and here's my posting to Vietnam and I think Colonel Cook had come through for me.

When you look back on that how do you think that demystifying of rank

- 19:00 **affected your military career?**

It made a big difference because country boys never experienced any of that discipline. If I had gone on to a higher school it perhaps may have because most of them were boarding schools but it made a hell of a difference because I was a lot more confident about talking to senior ranks and it also makes you

- 19:30 understand the fact that they are human. How can you be scared of a colonel wearing shorty pyjamas and thongs and things like that and we were calling people up to corporal by their first names and you understand just how human they can be. So that's was really good. It couldn't have happened at a better time really.

Plus I guess being straight out of Kapooka and going out in the field

- 20:00 **where all of sudden you are not saluting everyone makes a difference.**

Yeah that's right. That was good. We were living in tents of course but when you are doing your battling GD [General Details] stuff you don't wear a hat and all these officers wanted if you were wearing a hat was a salute first thing in the morning and if you saw them last thing at night. You know and that was the way it was for them and when I was in Canberra it was

- 20:30 pretty much the same in army office. It was at attention and, "Good morning Sir." first thing in the morning and at attention and, "Good afternoon Sir." last thing in the afternoon. The rest of the time they would walk around and you would practically ignore it unless they were a brigadier or above, but the brigadiers I knew were pretty good you know. So it was really great to be exposed to the officers like that.

Can you tell us about your motive for wanting to come back to Brisbane for that year before you?

- 21:00 Well I sort of decided that I should go to Vietnam and I thought if I come back here first it would give me a chance to get the family used to me being army. I'll be able to go home most weekends so they would still see me. It wouldn't be a total separation but it would only be on weekends so they were used to a bit of separation and make going away that bit easier and

- 21:30 that was really the main reason for that.

How long was your corps training?

It was six or eight weeks. It might have been 10 weeks for the clerical course. A lot of it was repetition and then there was another four weeks for the typing course after that and in the week between them my grandfather died so I was home for that.

- 22:00 **So it must have been a bit of shock when you got to Brisbane and all of a sudden you are heading up to Shoalwater again?**

Yeah I had this girlfriend see and she lived out at Nundah and I rang her as soon as I got off the train in Brisbane and said, "Shall we go out tonight?" "Yeah it was no worries." I had no idea how I was going to get from Wacol into town but I would and then I had to ring her back and say, "Can you meet me at Roma Street Station at such and such. I'm going to Rockhampton

- 22:30 tonight on the train." So that was a bit disappointing, but on the train I met this young lady. She was sitting opposite me and it was a bit cool and I was sitting in the window seat. It was a compartment on the old Rocky mail and this old bloke came in and said, "You're sitting in my seat." "There are plenty of seats.

- 23:00 There is enough room for 8." "My ticket number says that's my seat and that's where I want to sit." "Get stuffed." and I shifted and then this girl come in and I ignored him then and said, "Don't talk to that old prick. He's got the shits." so we got talking as soon as, after the train moved. I suppose we would have been about Petrie
- 23:30 before we really started talking. We cuddled up under my great coat for the night and that sort of consoled me about having to leave Brisbane straight away but that was a good night. She got off a Gladstone actually. I mean it was on to Rockhampton and a truck out to Shoalwater Bay again. I spent a lot of time in the back of a truck.

What sort of trucks were you getting around in then?

The old Mach 3s and when

- 24:00 we got back to Wacol the new ones, the six by six came out and they called them Mach five or F1 or something like that and they arrived at 5 Company I think it was down the other end. You know the drivers coming through trying to look all smooth you know and nonchalant, armed out the window, which is frowned upon by the army. Not looking left or right, you know, because everybody was looking at them.
- 24:30 They never changed because they did the same thing when we got the new Macks. I've been doing this for years.

Did you have to get an army license as well?

Eventually I did, but that was 1973 or 74. I was an instructor at Enoggera then on clerical courses and we had a basic WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corp] course come through and they of course lived in the WRAAC barracks and they had to be picked up everyday

- 25:00 so I was the one nominated to get a truck license and go down and pick them up and take them home for lunch. So I got that then but I had two years at Pucka as an instructor and we were just never allowed near the WRAAC classes down there because the two old dears, well the old dear and the sergeant who ran those courses hated male instructors so we weren't allowed near the female trainees
- 25:30 you know. Not that stopped a few blokes but yeah.

What about the blokes interacting with female civilians in Melbourne?

That didn't matter at all and a lot of them did but you were only there for a short time so there was never anything too serious unless you were a Melbourne boy, you would have known someone there and some of the Nashos

- 26:00 on the clerical course got posted back to Melbourne which was good for them you know, but I only met this one old lady there who bought us beers and gave us a record that I really got on with and she would have been about three times my age.

Did many of the blokes visit houses of ill repute?

I'd imagine so. I know we used to down St Kilda Road to the strip shows and that was a bit of an

- 26:30 eye opener for a country boy and it was certainly educational there. Never really seen a stripper take off everything. You know I thought, "Oh my God." and some of them used to get I suppose semi involved with some of the customers
- 27:00 because I imagine that even back then there were regulars that used to go there a lot and yeah, but Sydney as far as strip shows was the real eye opener, but Melbourne was an education that way and I would imagine some would go to places where they shouldn't ought to have been, yeah.

What sort of time did you spend up in Shoalwater when you first got posted to Brisbane?

Well I got up here at the end of August

- 27:30 and we were probably up there three or four weeks. Came back had a week off and when I went back I had been posted separately to Saigon and I was with the unit for a week or so and then I went up to do my battle efficiency course and part at Greenbank and part at Canungra and I was back then, I think that was, that was a three week course
- 28:00 so probably October and then I was back at the unit for another week and then I had a week off on pre-embarkation leave and I marched out of the unit then and into the personnel depot and I was there a few days or so and then off to Sydney to the personnel depot and then on the 707 [transport aircraft].

So what sort of warning time-wise did you have from the time you were told that you were going to actually leaving?

October, November -

- 28:30 2.5 months perhaps.

Can you tell us about the battle efficiency course?

Yeah that was pretty full on and one of the instructors was a Warrant Officer Bill Tomlinson whose father had owned a pub in Crows Nest and he looked enough like him for me to recognise him see and we did everything that we had to do and

- 29:00 they were pretty hard on us because there was not a lot of mountainous country around Greenbank and they took us out to Spring Mountain and we had to do an assault actually on Spring Mountain. Anyhow we all took turns in the section of being section commanding right through machine gunner, forward scout and everything and I spent a fair bit of time as forward scout and we were about to cross a road and something shone on the ground
- 29:30 and I found a tin can, a ration can with a .303 blank round stuck in it see and this was a sign to be a booby trap and there was only a bit of it showing and I'd been lucky enough to pick it up so I called the directing staff bloke up and he was pretty impressed and we'd immediately as we'd seen that formed a defensive perimeter sort of a thing and we did everything right with that.
- 30:00 We did the assault on the mountain and I said to the fellows, we were lucky because we had a bloke from Mt Isa who was a real bushy [knew how to live in the bush], that was his nickname Bushy and another bloke from Kingaroy. You could have driven a truck between his knees he was so bandy but the three of us out of 10 were bush people and the guy from Mt Isa was acting as the section commander and I said, "What we'll do is walk up here and only step on the rocks?"
- 30:30 'Why?' "If you step on the grass you are going to make a noise, see, and we know they've got to be there because that's the whole idea of it. We'll all walk on the rocks." and we did that I got to within six ft of the enemy blokes before they knew we were there. You know that buggered up a lot of their ambush and that was good and we had a nine mile run which was 15
- 31:00 kms. Anyway early night see and I'd had a few beers with Bill Tomlinson the warrant officer and he was with the training team working with the Montagnards and they loved him so much they gave him a tiger cub as a gift and this particular night he sent a bloke down to our tent, "Lange, Dalton and Sandeson. Warrant Officer Tomlinson wants you up in the boozer tent."
- 31:30 and we got up there and we said, "What's wrong, Sir?" and he said, "Lange you bastard." "What's wrong?" "You're from Crows Nest and you are going to let a little thing like a nine mile run make you go to bed early." "Yes." "Well you're not". So he kept the three of us there until closing time and in the meantime he went back to his tent and brought all his training memorabilia, training team memorabilia with him. The man had been recommended for so many medals
- 32:00 and not allowed to accept them because they were Vietnamese or American medals and some of them he had accepted sort of unofficially and he had paperwork for them and we sat there and we drank until closing time and then Clancy said to him, "How long does it take for you to do the run, Sir?" "About an hour." and he said, "We'll do better." "Shut your mouth stupid.
- 32:30 The staff are only carrying a water bottle and a stick and we are carrying a rifle, ammunition, a full pack, full water bottles everything." A carton or beer or a bottle of rum on it well we did our 15 kms in an hour and 59 and Tommo paid up so when we left there we had Bundaberg Rum in our water bottles
- 33:00 and that was good. We had a day or so at Canungra and we did the Battle of Inoculation Range where you advance up this level area and they had the old Vickers machine gun over your head. The old .303. They used them because they were more accurate than the M60 and it wasn't a chance of being hit and it makes you realise how slow they go
- 33:30 you'd actually see the sun glint off a .303 round going over your head then there's explosions going off in the fire lanes beside you and you do a live fire at the end of it. It was exciting. It still wasn't real but it was an indication of what you could be facing. So that, it was a hard three weeks but it was good and you came back even fitter and.

34:00 Were there any other preparations you had to do before you left?

Stack of needles that was really it. Write your Will out. Just minor administrative things that's all. Sort out your bank accounts and so on.

And what did your worldly possessions consist of at that stage?

I had a I'd sold my car

- 34:30 so I had .22 Hornet rifle and a .22 rifle with a telescope on it so really about it as far as non-military possessions went. That was all there really was and a stack of records.

So what did you get up to on your re-embarkation leave?

I had a few days at home

- 35:00 and I borrowed a car and took this girl down to the Gold Coast for the day. We went swimming on the beach, the main beach there at Surfers [Surfers Paradise] and we come back and we'd be parked in a secluded little spot on the edge of Toowoomba. We ended up sleeping in the car that night because

afterwards we fell asleep. Yeah so that didn't impress

35:30 the people at home all the much but what the hell, that was the last night I was going to be able to spend with her so we made the most of that and the rest of the time I just spent around home. Had a few beers at the pub.

And sort of family farewell or anything like that?

Oh I think yeah the family. I think someone else

36:00 they had a farewell for me. I think yeah, I think it was in the hall out at the showgrounds and they presented me with a cigarette case and I've probably still got it somewhere. I don't smoke anymore so I've got no use for it. It'll be around here somewhere. That was it because as I said I think I was the first bloke to join the army from Crows Nest since the Second World War you know

36:30 and to some of them that meant something.

And what did it mean to you? Did you wear your uniform home?

No. I wore it to home but that was all and I wore it from home and back to Brisbane and it was starting to fit by then too so that was handy and the big thing was you had the new GP [general purpose] boots instead of boots and gaiters and in the army at that stage that was an indication that you either had been or

37:00 were going to Vietnam because they were the only people who had then. There just weren't enough of them.

So what were the reactions of people in town?

Around Crows Nest was pretty good. A bit isolated but I'd, during part of my break when I knew I was going I think I might have taken a week off

37:30 on rec [recreational] leave as well because I went to Rockhampton and saw a girl I knew pretty well up there and that didn't come over very well and she didn't think we should be in Vietnam and that was the end of our relationship so I caught a cab home from Rockhampton to Brisbane.

How much did that cost you?

Bugger all. I paid for some of his fuel. You see when we were up there the first time, it's raining,

38:00 in Rockhampton we used to get every second day off between the exercises so every second day you could jump on the truck and go into town and you know we met these girls. We rang up the hospital and there were four of us and we ended up getting four nurses from the hospital to go out with us and we all went parking on top of Mt Archer in taxis and we missed the truck

38:30 back to camp so between the four of us we hired this taxi and it went from Rockhampton right out to Shoalwater Bay and no vehicle movement restrictions because it was between exercises anyhow when I was up there for that week and had the same cab driving and he's driving up in Rockhampton. I saw him last year and you know I said, "Well I'd better get moving.

39:00 I go and ticket for the train back to Brisbane." "Oh I've got a cab I'll drive you back." "Well why don't you. how much would it cost?" "Not much." he said, "I've haven't seen my sister down there for a long time." So he went and rang Mum and Dad up and said, "Get packed. We're going down to Brisbane to see so-and-so." So in a white valiant, which was a yellow cab,

39:30 he put in a call for an out of town fare and they said, "Where to?" and he said, "Brisbane." And there was silence. "Say again, car 10." so I came home by cab and we went to Toowoomba after we dropped Mum and Dad off in Brisbane and I met the girl in the yellow cab office here and had quite a heated affair with her until I went away and then we went to Crows Nest. He stayed a couple of days with us and

40:00 that was it. Then last year when I was up at Marty's, I rang him up and he's done bus driving and that between times but he's back driving a cab now.

Okay we'll stop there. That tapes just about ended.

Tape 5

00:31 **You were saying before that when you were doing your corps training that there were a couple of guys that had already been to Vietnam doing the clerical course.**

That's right yeah.

What had they told you about Vietnam?

I think pretty well the same as we've told people since. All the good parts. They were both drivers and they had operated around

01:00 the Vung Tau area and really nothing much had happened to them and they hadn't seen a lot but the thing was it with though it didn't matter where you were there was still that element of risk. You didn't know who you could trust and who you couldn't so it was safest not to trust anybody. But they just glossed most of it over and that reinforced the thing that it was just an adventure

01:30 and it won't be really bad at all. But that's all they said. They did talk about a few incidents in Vung Tau in bars and so on and that was interesting with bar girls and going home with some of them afterwards so that sort of let me know that it wouldn't be a desert sexually, I suppose. So that helped.

What had they told you?

02:00 Just about the, probably about the size and the willingness of some Vietnamese bar girls, and the fact that they will try and con drinks out of you all night or Saigon tea and it's supposed to be a shot of whisky but it is in fact probably cold tea or something like that and they're probably double the normal price of a can of beer and the more of these you buy they more attentive they

02:30 become to your needs and that's about it. Mentioned some of them are better in bed than others really, but different anywhere.

You said they sort of glossed over it and told you the good parts.

Yeah.

What did they tell you?

Just about full speed up the highway from Vung Tau to Nui Dat and back and you have only got two speeds; flat out and stopped and various places along the highway you might see an armoured personnel carrier

03:00 parked just for security and if there were potentially trouble spots along the road quite often you would see some infantry in there or a personnel carrier just for your safety. So back then I guess they got the name 'Gallopers Green Grocers' because they carried all the stores and food and that type of thing and they were always flat out

03:30 and it would have been an interesting sort of a life up and down that road because it wasn't a big distance. I can't remember the exact distance but you know it wasn't all that far but it was in your own best interests to do it as quick as you could and that was really about all. They never really talked about being shot at or anything like that so it was all good clean fun really. That's about it.

So you've been home

04:00 **in Crows Nest on your pre-embarkation leave. It's time to go what happened?**

Well the we had a few beers in Brisbane the night before and we flew down to Sydney. I think we had a couple of nights there so went into the Cross [Kings Cross] as you do and you go to the strip clubs and they were a little bit more advanced I suppose or a little bit more liberal than the ones in Melbourne even though

04:30 even then it wasn't terribly legal. The shows in the Cross were quite explicit and you took a lot of notice because where you were going to go there weren't any round eye girls or very few and so you were quite interested in the Australian girls before you left and I was afterwards I was approached by a lady walking down the footpath who asked me would I like a little

05:00 bit of fun for the night and I had the money but I didn't have the inclination with that particular one and we went back out to Watsons Bay and that's where we stayed.

What about actually saying goodbye to your family the day that you left?

They came to Brisbane and that was a bit hard. I probably had a tear in my eye myself and they were all crying and so on and my mother and sister each

05:30 had a little brooch on which I'd never seen before and it had my photo in it with a slouch hat on and so on and I thought to myself, "That's probably over doing it a bit but if it makes them feel better it's all right." and it appears they wore that every time they went out. They'd go from Crows Nest into Toowoomba and they would be in a shop or something and someone would mention it, "That's my son

06:00 in Vietnam." And I guess it made them feel better about it so I didn't worry about it at all.

Did most of the other blokes have a lot of their family there to see them off?

No. There probably only two families here in Brisbane when we left Brisbane because they probably were the only ones that were close enough. They were spread all over the state. I don't know how many but there were a lot of us that went down from Brisbane

06:30 on that particular flight and there were even less in Sydney I think. They seemed to come from all spread out areas.

So how many of you were there when you left Sydney?

707 full you know. I don't know how many they took from memory. 707 economy seating all the way and every seat was taken and we had beer

07:00 until Darwin. We landed in Darwin and from Darwin to Singapore we were out of beer before we got to Singapore and we all had to take our army shirts off before we got off the plane in Singapore and put a civilian shirt on because Singapore was neutral and it wasn't politically convenient for them to have soldiers on the way to Vietnam so we all put on civvy [civilian] shirts. Nobody would ever

07:30 noticed that we had the same coloured shoes and pants on and we all had short hair cuts so it would have gone straight past them, but yeah, the civvy shirt in Singapore and then went onto Saigon.

Do you remember how long you were in Singapore for?

Couple of hours.

And what did you do?

Sat in the terminal that was it. They refuelled there so they didn't have to spend any more time than necessary on the ground in Saigon. It wasn't a popular area.

08:00 **So it sounds like the mood was pretty good between Australia and Singapore.**

It was. You got a bit nervous particularly when we got close to Vietnam. You look out the window and there were a couple of American jet fighters alongside you. They were just your escort in. Not that the VC or NVA [North Vietnamese Army] had aircraft that far south but there was always the chance,

08:30 the very slim chance of some anti aircraft fire or maybe a rocket and the jets were there to draw that and the big difference in the landing was we went down very fast and the pilot explained that to us. Instead of like Brisbane or Sydney airport where you go down gradually he just said, "We are going to descend very rapidly so you'll probably have to

09:00 clear your eardrums sort of thing when we get on the ground because the quicker we get down the less chance we have of getting shot at." This is getting serious and so we went down and we all got out and all the other blokes that are there ready to go home and you know they are all saying, "How long have you got to go?" "365."

09:30 "Nobody's got that long." and they got on the plane and away they went. We got on buses and some of us went into Saigon itself into the Free World Headquarters. The rest of them went to an area called Camp Alfred transferred to military aircraft and went to Vung Tau and Nui Dat and I thought we were going to be attacked at any moment because

10:00 during all of your training you are taught that you can recognise the Viet Cong because they all wear black. Everybody wore black all around the streets. Black pants, black shirts. Some of them might have had other coloured shirts but black was the predominant colour and you are taught that the VC all wear black and here they are and, "Shit I'm not even going to make it to the bloody headquarters." You go in there

10:30 and you go through the march in procedure at Headquarter Company and you go to the Q store and you get issued with a rifle so that makes you feel a bit better. So you sign for it and make sure all the parts are there and then they take it back off you and lock it up again. "Shouldn't we have that?" "No, you won't need it here." We then went to our places of accommodation and there were a number of hotels

11:00 because they had no barracks as such and they had offices in some hotels and a little bit lower quality hotel they might have had the warrant officers and then the sergeants in other one and the soldiers in another one. I was in one called the Canberra Hotel and we used the initial BEQ [Bachelor Enlisted Quarters], BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] which is something we got from the Americans; bachelor enlisted quarters and bachelor officer quarters

11:30 and we got to the Canberra Hotel and you pull up there and there is a guard out the front with a rifle in a concrete box sort of a thing with sandbags all around it and there is a screen over the lower two floors of the hotel and you walk in there and there is a few Vietnamese walking around and then you find as part of your pay you get what is called a Saigon Living Allowance because you had to pay rent

12:00 on your hotel room. You had to have a maid. This helped the local economy you see and the one maid might look after two or three or four rooms so you had to pay your maid as well and this is just to get people on side and help them out a little bit. So you are living in a hotel with a guard out the front and all the buildings are touching each other

12:30 and you've got Vietnamese living with you and you think, "What have I got into?" and you get up the next morning and you put your greens on and most of the guys are wearing polyesters. "What's going in?" "You don't need to wear greens?" So we worked in polyesters and that was nice and some blokes had missed the bus and they got a taxi which was usually one of those old Renaults or Citroens and go

to work in that

- 13:00 or get what we called a 'kamikaze' which is a motor bike with two wheels in the front and that was big enough for two or three people to sit side by side and if you want a terrifying experience drive through Saigon in one of those because the traffic would make Sydney look quite and if you have a prang in them you are there first so there are no problems in Saigon so they would have us believe.
- 13:30 Anyhow we got to work and they give us briefing of what we could and couldn't do. Curfew I thing was had to be back by I don't know 2.00 in the morning you had to be back in your hotel or you had to stay where you were. The first eight or nine nights I never went anywhere and then I met a bloke called Taffy and he said, "Come up to the Capitol
- 14:00 and have a beer." and I met a Yank named Mike. He was US Navy and Taffy and Mike were really good friends. "Come on we'll go down the nancy bar." The Capitol was the American BOQ and it was massive and they had Vietnamese girls in there working as waitresses and alcohol was cheap and Clive said, "I'll have to get you a girlfriend." "Why?" "Those of us
- 14:30 who want good service have a girlfriend who works here." This one girl came across to Clive and she was his girlfriend and that's how you got good service, so he talked to this girl and after a couple of weeks they decided on a suitable girlfriend for me and when you came in you would look to see where she was working and you tried to get a seat in her area and she made sure you got looked after. But we went
- 15:00 down the street about 40 yards to a little bar called the Nancy Bar and that became one of our little favourites and we were there until probably midnight. You've got to remember I was young and single there and, "Come on we're going." "Where are we going?" "Oh." he said, "We've got a couple of girls for the night." "Oh yeah?" "Well let's go." I can't remember what it cost. It wasn't a hell of a lot but we went to this house where these girls
- 15:30 lived and old mamasan [brothel Madame] sitting there as we walked in and just ignored us and the mattresses were on the floor although I think one of the other blokes might have had a bed. Two of us were on a mattress on a floor and the room separation was a curtain and I had this lovely young Vietnamese girl to spend the night with and it was the first time obviously that I had,
- 16:00 that I'd sex with a Vietnamese girl and I wasn't sure what to expect. Was it going to be any different? Did I have to do anything different? Turned out I did and but she was quite good. She was friendly. She was quite loving and I woke up in the morning and I said, "Aren't they family-orientated these people?" "Yeah they are."
- 16:30 "She's even got the old bloke's picture on the wall." Anyway, Mike stuck his head under the curtain and said, "Shit. Clive we're going." "What's wrong?" "I'll tell you later." It was Ho Chi Minh's photo on the wall in this girl's room so we had probably just made a donation to the Viet Cong war effort. We never went back to that place but obviously a little
- 17:00 bit more careful but the money was good there and it was tax free and the beer was cheap. I had a couple of days crook then. Nine days in the country I drank nine bottles of Ba Moui Ba, 33, it was called. What was it? Ba Moui Ba. The Bar I think is 3, Bar Ne would have to be 30 and the other
- 17:30 Bar is three so 33 was the beer and anyhow it was straight off the shelf so you put a block of ice in the beer. Anyhow the water was shithouse anyhow. You weren't supposed to drink it but you pour the beer over the ice and on the ninth bottle I was feeling pretty good and a bloody big cockroach came out of the bottle into my glass and I knew then that I was going to be
- 18:00 unwell and the guts were playing up for three or four days. I had it coming out of both ends so I was as sick as a dog so I found there it was better to pay a little bit extra in a bar and buy American beer which was sealed in a can rather than drink the Vietnamese beer. It was not good for you.

Lets just go back to the

- 18:30 **the actual flight over. When you said things were sort of, the guys were getting a bit tense a bit nervous. What was actually going on in the flight? Were people singing or were they?**
- There was a lot of yahooing and so on as far as Singapore but after Singapore the noise level went down and by the time those two American fighters jets pulled up beside us there was not really
- 19:00 any sound at all. Getting a little bit nervous, a little bit jumpy and probably a little bit scared. Possibly not scared as much as a bit worried but you know that there is a fighter just off your wingtip there's got to be a reason for this. So definitely worried about what you were getting yourself into and then
- 19:30 there wasn't a sound even when we landed. There was when we walked out the plane because all these other buggers who were going home were cheering us so I guess we were replacing them.

What struck you as being really different about Saigon when you first got off the plane?

Heat. Heat and steam it was so bloody hot and then the smells.

- 20:00 Hygiene probably wasn't all that good. I saw a lady, we could be going to work in the bus and we used to drive up a street along the railway line and there would be people squatting on the line itself on the rail and they're crapping on one side of the line and peeing on the other that sort of thing and that was it and depending which way the wind was blowing at work you'd smell
- 20:30 the fish market down the road and the smell was always there even though you got used to it if you ever thought, "No smell." it would very quickly be back there again and the noise and the traffic and the smoke. The fumes, the pollution from that because all the bikes were two strokes. Everyone had a motorbike.
- 21:00 Up to a certain size you didn't have to have a license to drive your motorbike. It was all run on cheap shit two-stroke and the cars all smoked. You know then there were military trucks everywhere and some were diesels and their exhaust smoke so there is this bluish smoke haze all over the streets most of the time. The only time it would stop really was during curfew hours when they had to be off the roads
- 21:30 and the noise and so many, so many vehicles and push bikes. It wasn't very unusual to see half a dozen Vietnamese on something like a Lambretta scooter or a little 50cc motorbike. They just pack them on and the way across the road was you just had to weave your way across.
- 22:00 Unless you happened to be at an intersection where you were one of the white mice, the Vietnamese police were on duty then it was a bit easier. Later on when we were armed it was a lot easier. You just stepped out with a rifle and held up your hand and walked across. Like Moses crossing the Red Sea. The water sort of parted in front of you so that was okay but heat
- 22:30 and then the monsoons and in your office it was so hot because where I worked in the registry, it was a secure area so all our windows were painted black so nobody could see inside, and the fact that we were unarmed didn't seem right. That you could go out at night in civilian clothes, it just
- 23:00 it didn't seem right that we weren't armed right from the start, but I guess you after a couple of weeks you ignored it because it didn't seem to mean much to anybody else, and then I found out that a lot of the blokes that went out at night and wore greens carried an illegal pistol and that would be in the leg pocket on the green, and through
- 23:30 this American Mike I got a .45 service automatic and that always went on the side pocket of my greens and carried on the left pocket and you'd cut out a piece of cardboard the size of your pocket and you'd put that in your pocket and then you put the gun in beside it so that the imprint wasn't seen on the outside so for all intents and purposes you were unarmed but it gave you a little feeling of security to know that you did have
- 24:00 it there and so that was a bit more comforting.

What about your first day at work once you got to Saigon?

Totally out of my depth. Since I'd finished my corps training I'd only had about two weeks in an office. The rest of the time I was either on leave or battle efficiency course or up on exercise and there wasn't really much office work

- 24:30 up there. It turned out after a day or so it was all right. It was mainly registration of inwards and outwards correspondence back to Australia, receiving stuff in and that sort of became mind numbing after a while because that was all you were doing and then you graduated onto looking up files, putting papers on files, dragging files out for officers delivering files and
- 25:00 urgent messages and so on. Even that becomes boring pretty quickly and the big adventure is not really much of an adventure then. Once you got in the building it was like being in any other building I suppose at home because you couldn't see outside so you pretty much forgot what was going on outside.

Were you disappointed?

- 25:30 To a degree yeah. I expected something a little bit more active at least to and from work because you are moving through a Vietnamese area so that was a let down because you are all keyed up for this. You are going to a war zone and these people who are against you all the way and almost everybody's wearing black
- 26:00 and you are driving through them all the time and they are through your side of the wall or the other side of the wall your hotel in the next building. There's more of them but the higher ups never I suppose seemed concerned about that. It wasn't a problem and then it died into the background
- 26:30 so you tended to forget about it a lot but you still had that side arm in your pocket.

Did the higher ups know that that went on?

Possibly. There was an order came out saying that this was an illegal practice so they must have had some idea and I'd say quite a lot of them had the same.

Do you remember how much it cost to buy the pistol?

About \$25 US so it wasn't much.

27:00 **And was that the currency you used mainly when you were there?**

We used MPC, Military Payment Coin, which allegedly had the same value as US green [dollars] and it was only to be used in military establishments but it also became a legal accepted currency throughout the country as far as I'm aware. It certainly was in Saigon. You'd go into a Vietnamese bar and you'd pay for your drinks with MPC.

27:30 You went to a brothel and you'd pay for your girl with MPC, that sort of thing, so it was all MPC. American green was worth a lot more: \$5 American green would probably get you \$15 MPC although nominally they had the same value, \$5 to \$5 but they could buy more on the black market with green.

And did you ever get green?

28:00 No I never worried about. No need for it really. What they used to do was twice in the year I was there they changed all the currency so you had 24 hours to hand in all your MPC to have it replaced with the new stuff so there was Vietnamese out there trying to sell it back to you at half price because suddenly all their money was valueless. There were probably five or

28:30 six prostitutes committed suicide once that happened because they had been building up thousands and thousands of MPC and suddenly it's worth nothing. They couldn't give it away.

What do you think prompted them to do that?

Suicide?

No, no changing the currency.

Just for that because it was commonly used by the Vietnamese so suddenly it had no value so fewer Vietnamese living on MPC

29:00 all of a sudden you had no money. That's the reason why and it was designed I suppose to try and convince not to use MPC but everybody did. It was. You could go to your local cash office and exchange MPC for paesta and a lot of people did but if you were in an

29:30 American establishment you still needed your MPC to buy stuff there so you'd go to a bar and you'd run out of paesta so you'd use MPC and that was all there was to it but suddenly it was, in 24 hours it was valueless and they actually used to catch quite a few Americans each time with excess amounts of MPC and they'd have the military police onto them, "How come

30:00 you have so much MPC?" It was obvious they were in obviously in a black market trade. Either using it to buy and sell stuff or trying to change it for someone who shouldn't have had it in the first place.

What sort of stuff was on the black market?

Anything you wanted really. Like I suppose that's where I got my handgun from. I got that from a

30:30 Yank MP [Military Police] lieutenant and from the same guy I got a 50 calibre machine gun because we wanted an ice making machine for our hotel and you know, I, over a period of a month or so I got myself another pair of army boots and a couple of slouch hats and so on and I had enough to trade with but this navy bloke,

31:00 the US navy bloke didn't want army boots and slouch hats. "Well what do you want for it?" He's on a big landing craft you know. "I want a machine gun." So I went to another American. Once again the MP lieutenant and I swapped it all to him for a 50 calibre machine gun. "How good is this?" "It's brand new but according to the records it's been written off

31:30 on a river boat up north." So I borrowed a jeep and a driver from him, we took it out to this landing craft and we gave it to them if they wanted it and we loaded a bloody ice making machine on the back of a jeep and I got back to the hotel and the catering sergeant had got wind of what was going on and he refused to let it into the hotel because it had been illegally bought so I sold it back to the Yanks. I got my money back. But there were people involved in drugs and so on too but that was largely an American thing and you could probably buy anything you wanted that way and you could buy

32:00 a little girl or a little boy up to a woman, pretty well anything you wanted

32:30 and you would be walking down the street and some kid would come up to you. "Do you want a girl?" "No I don't want a girl." "She's a good girl. She's clean." "How do you know she's clean?" "She my sister." and this would be a 10-year-old kid out trying to sell his sister for a couple of hours and that sort of made you stop and think a bit and

33:00 I don't know too many people who went and paid for someone like that off the street. You know because VD [Venereal Disease] was pretty rife and you had to be careful. It was better if you went to some sort of hotel type establishment where you could get a room and they had the bar girls upstairs and you could take them to bed and at least

33:30 there you know there was some sort of control and you were going to get ripped off but not badly, and you knew you were unlikely to get knifed or something during the night when you are asleep.

Do you remember how much it cost for a girl for the night?

Yeah, well there was one French Vietnamese girl and that was \$75

34:00 MPC for the night, but by the time morning came I figured she was well worth it. She was a good looking girl too she was. Some Vietnamese girls were funny as far as sex went. Where you were allowed to touch them and where you weren't. This girl and two others that I knew over there hell really seemed to enjoy it

34:30 and she did things that I sort of hardly ever read about before. She was that good. Another one was a Vietnamese-Cambodian girl and she used to really get into it and enjoy herself. That was two in Saigon. Some of them you might as well have a pillow or a blow up bloody doll or something. Obviously it didn't cost as much either.

How much were you getting paid a week?

35:00 We were getting about. The Saigon allowance was \$5 a day and you got that one week and you got your normal pay the next and I don't remember what that was but out of that \$5, \$70 a fortnight you paid for your room and your maid first before you did anything else.

Did guys spend a large amount of their pay having a good time?

Yeah.

35:30 I didn't worry too much about saving any money. After 12 months I came home with \$1,000 that I hadn't got around to. I might have been a bit more than that. I bought a camera there and a couple of watches that sort of thing, but I bought some good clothes. Tailor made and cheaper but by the time I got back they were well and truly out of fashion. You looked out of place wearing

36:00 them but over there it wasn't a problem, but I drank a lot, and I think a lot of drank a lot more than we should of because when you can buy a bottle of Chivas Regal for \$1.80, you know, you don't have any reason not to sort of drink it and Beenleigh used to make Beenleigh overproof and it was in an oval-shaped dark bottle with ships on it. You could buy a bottle of that for

36:30 75c, so 40c worth of rum you could see the ships moving and it was really strong. I gave a hillbilly from Tennessee some one night and he was talking about his mountain dew and white lightning and that sort of thing and it crossed his eyes. It was strong.

And so was the drinking not frowned upon as long as you turned up at work the next day?

37:00 Yeah. The army was like that for years and years. Now as far as alcohol was concerned, because some people had a reputation as a drinker but still able to be at work first thing in the morning and do his job and all that sort of stuff, so it, you know, it wasn't sort of actively encouraged but quite often what is now referred to as peer group pressure,

37:30 you know, to go out on the grog and so while you are doing it you might as well enjoy yourself and you are in a place like that and you accept that you could be killed at any moment. Saigon you are in a hotel building. In Nui Dat you are behind barbed wire guarded by Australians and it was a big base so if you were mortared

38:00 you had a chance of not being there if it hit anybody. In Saigon you didn't have that chance and it wasn't until the Tet Offensive started at the end of January '68 that we came to realise that, so life became that much sweeter and that much more in some ways reckless.

Before Tet did you or anyone you know

38:30 **run into any real danger in Saigon?**

Not that I'm aware of. The Americans did. The Koreans sometimes. They didn't like the Koreans and they didn't like the Americans.

What sort of stuff would happen to them ?

They put a bomb on the American bus, I think it was, or the Korean bus just before I got there and that killed a few.

39:00 But we had a big square board on the front of our bus with a map of Australia on it and a big red kangaroo and a boomerang with 'uc da loi' [Vietnamese name for Australians] written on it and they knew it was Australian.

What was written on it?

Uc da loi and that's what they called Australians and

What did that mean?

I don't know the literal translation of it but basically it stood for 'Australia' and when we went out

- 39:30 in uniform we were obviously Australian. You wore a slouch hat or a beret and that stood out and if you were in greens we wore a slouch hat and our greens looked most of the time a little bit different from the Americans. I got a little bit of a fright because I am standing outside the front door of headquarters and I'm wearing a steel hat and a flak jacket and this American officer thought I was American and
- 40:00 that increased your chances of being shot at so you didn't sort of wear anything like that unless you were in a position where you had to. Say you were on guard or something like that. But I don't think we were probably disliked as much as the Americans. Koreans were more feared than anything else. If they pacified an area, it stayed pacified you know. I guess
- 40:30 it's an Asian thing. They sort of don't have a lot of I suppose respect or feeling for human life and that could be because there are so many. Their history maybe so they were probably feared more than anyone else there because of their sort of tendency for super violence basically. I don't think we were disliked as much
- 41:00 as the Americans.

Did you feel any safer at work?

Yeah, yeah. The building we were in was probably six or eight storeys high. I think originally it had been Madam Nu's Rest Home for Wayward Girls and there's Australians, New Zealand, some Americans, Vietnamese there and we had our air force there and a couple of navy people I think from memory.

- 41:30 They might have been air force. Only army and air force there but most of the building was Australian and from the outside it looked pretty solid. Oh and a couple of Filipinos around as well in the...

Tape 6

- 00:31 **While you were in Saigon are there things that really stand out of your memories?**

There are a few. The start of the Tet Offensive in 68. That was the Chinese New Year and that was the 1st of January or 1st February or something like that and with the Asians, a lot of fireworks involved with their celebrations and the guy across the road used to hang a string of them there

- 01:00 as you come up to the new year and they would all go off one after the other see and one affect this had after you got used to it was when there really was a rifle shot or a gun going off initially, you could have taken it for the fireworks and we were all just going to normal on the day it all started and we got to work and suddenly it's hit the fan and
- 01:30 everyone's being issued with their rifles and so on. We had been to the range to fire them and hadn't seen it since and it changed in the space of a couple of hours, so 24 hour curfew practically and unless it was urgent you didn't go anywhere. But I spent the first eight nights on guard at our general's house
- 02:00 and we had the general and the air commodore sharing a house and that was two maybe 300 m at the most from the front gate of the president's house and there was a big tree-lined avenue to the palace front gates and the generals' house as you walked out the palace gates was off to your left up that street and
- 02:30 we got there the first night. Steel hats, flack jackets. Fully booted and spurred you know and the ADO [Aide de Camp] aide came out and he said, "Fellas, this is the game tonight. Nobody on the street. If you see anybody coming from your left anywhere at all." and he pointed out a tree, "anywhere to the left of that tree you can shoot them as soon as you see them." and he went right around the full arc and of course
- 03:00 each part of the arc they had to be closer. The last part of the arc he said, "If you see anyone coming from that area don't shoot them at all. We'll get you back inside the house. The guard at the gate of the palace is on a 30 calibre machine gun and he's nervous too. You didn't want to shoot at somebody and think that he was being shot at." Pretty terrified that first night.
- 03:30 Around the other side we were also facing the front. On the left hand side as we faced the palace the Viet Cong were held up in a building there and they were attempting to make their way into the palace grounds so there was a lot of shooting that night. I didn't get a lot of sleep hiding behind a fence about foot, foot and half thick but only made out of shit mortar. It probably wouldn't have given a lot of bloody resistance to a bullet.
- 04:00 So it was a bit uncomfortable for that but you know after a few days you were a little bit reassured that you were going to be all right and during the day you were back to work and went back and did your own job.

Was there any kind of warning that there would be something happening?

There had been intelligence briefings. We used to get one every week that we could expect some kind of offensive

04:30 but I don't think they really expected it sort of so wide spread. This was from the border down.

What was the general sort of playing out of an intelligence brief?

Go into this small room and the operations major would get up and say a little bit and point out on a map where actions had happened during a week and supposed body counts

05:00 with the Americans and then go through the Australian actions during the week and they were real body counts and then the intelligence officer would stand up and say what he thought was going to happen for the next week. You know and I suppose they were right about half the time it seemed but that was really about all.

Were you privy to information that was sensitive?

Some yeah because we handled all the

05:30 telex messages in and out. They would come from the Comm [Communications] Centre next door into us and we would register and file them and then if, depending on the priority of it we would deliver it to the appropriate officers and anything really classified usually went to operations branch. Personnel info like the casualties I think from memory that went to the personnel branch

06:00 but operational stuff obviously to ops branch.

And when you did have your weapon when everything was getting a bit hairy, did you still have your SLR or did they issue you with something?

Yeah. You felt a lot safer with that. Where the general lived the chief of police would live next door and the little Vietnamese cop who used to be on guard at the general's house during the day had a bit of thing for the police chief's daughter and he used to sleep in a shed.

06:30 As soon as we would get there this cop would high tail it out the back and he would be in the shed and he would sneak next door and see the daughter. I spent about an hour, two or three with the police chief one night and he tried real hard to get us to sell him one of our rifles. He really wanted one and he had been up in the highlands tiger hunting and all this kind of stuff and he was a dead keen shooter

07:00 but he loved that Australian SLR.

In general did you get any kind of feeling about how the South Vietnamese felt about Australians?

Yeah. A lot of them felt better about us than they did the Yanks. I think generally we treated them better. There's obviously exceptions to that but in a bar they preferred the Yanks because they spent

07:30 more money. They used to say, "Uc da loi [Vietnamese name for Australians] cheat Charlie." And that was the thing. You used to try and get the girl to sit with you without buying a drink but there wasn't too many. She might sit with you for a while and then she'd go away and a while later thinking she would come back to you for about 15 minutes and then she'd ask for another one and, "No, No." and then she'd wait for five minutes and keep trying and then maybe later she'd come back.

08:00 With the Americans they fleeced them pretty easily.

Besides finding yourself in what was probably a Viet Cong brothel, did you ever have the feeling bad feelings about certain people, certain places that you thought might have been on the wrong side?

Yeah the sometimes the eyes of people and the way they looked at you.

08:30 You felt a bit of unease about that. Particularly after the Tet Offensive when we went back to being allowed out at restricted hours. Curfew might have been 6.00pm to 6.00am or something like that so you would have time to go for a beer in a Yank hotel after work and I lived in the American Hotel for three or four months I guess. But sometimes in the eyes,

09:00 you can see it and you just feel a bit uncomfortable about that person and you would feel uncomfortable when you were in a taxi because you would never get out of it. Only a two-door car and if you were more than one of you in there you are sitting in the back and you've got no hope of getting out. They are smaller than a Volkswagen. I remember the kamikaze. A motorbike with the seat at the front. I never

09:30 felt secure in them because you were totally exposed. You felt a bit better because we had to travel armed in the traffic for a long time after the Tet because you felt a little bit better because you are sitting there with your feet up in the front and an SLR lying across your knees and I suppose you looked a bit like two people up on top of a stage coach really but there were a lot of areas

10:00 you didn't feel comfortable in. There were a lot of areas we didn't go. You wouldn't go deeper in Shalon past our hotel. You would avoid that. I don't know if anyone much went down there. The ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] I suppose sometimes.

Wasn't there, was there a story that one of the South Vietnamese hierarchy couldn't believe that you blokes were at Shalon?

Yeah that was at some sort of function

10:30 at the headquarters and the only reason I was there was they wanted somebody from each office and I happened to be there and the boss said, "You go." and so I went down and talking to this Vietnamese officer and the subject of accommodation came up and, "Where do you live?" "The Canberra Hotel down in Shalon."

11:00 Ton Yuc Phuong or Tran Quoc Ka or one of the others was the name of the street and, "You live down there. Why do they have you down there?" "Why not?" "Ninety percent Chinese and the Chinese are Communist supporters. I can't understand why they would have you down there." but I suppose it came down to money. A better quality place would have cost more money.

Did you ever get the feeling that even

11:30 **the South Vietnamese would hold Ho Chi Minh in fairly high regard?**

A lot of them would have yeah. I read a book once that sort of suggested that he didn't start out to be a Communist. He was a nationalist and he wanted a united Vietnam without the French and he asked for American help and I can't remember the name of the presidents.

12:00 He died towards the end of the Second World War and the other one wasn't real interested. He didn't want to go to the Chinese for help so he went to the Russians and of course they helped. That's where they got their AK47s [AK47 machine guns]. There was a lot of Chinese there too, but Ho I suppose to a lot of them would have been a hero and there would have been some in the north who didn't like him

12:30 but it was mainly when it was divided the Communists were supposed to be north of the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone] and the non-Communists the Christians or whatever south but obviously that doesn't happen so yeah, there would have been supporters and non-supporters on both sides.

Did you ever see in Saigon any of the hangovers of the French occupation?

Yeah all the streets, the avenues.

13:00 The beautiful big wide streets and a lot of them with trees along there and some of the buildings. You'd see it in the country. I used to fly around occasionally in an American helicopter and you would out in the middle of the rice fields and here's this church. The French influence and Vung Tau there is a lot of it was well. The French had a hell of an influence there in the parts I saw and I imagine they did even further up north.

13:30 Places like Da Nang and things like that. But they didn't really like the French either. They colonised it but I think from memory they were very overbearing and treated them not well, but they did I suppose as far as Christianity and all that. Introduced that a lot...

Did you ever get

14:00 **opportunities to eat any of the local cuisine?**

Oh yeah hepatitis rolls. We were supposed to bloody not eat that sort of stuff and a mate of mine said, "A French only taught the Vietnamese to do two things well and that was make bread and suck cocks." And we said they do both rather well, and they used to make these magnificent bread rolls

14:30 and you pull up at some little roadside joint and ham roll and I suppose that's sort of more susceptible to contamination than most meats but you get your ham roll or your hepatitis roll and it was always good and there was a few of walking down the street one night and there was a Mexican and strangely enough his name was Jesus and he was US Navy

15:00 and we had Mike the US Navy and I can't remember the other guys name but he was a Marine and Taffy, the Welsh Australian bloke and myself and we all had a bottle of our favourite booze with us. So we were walking down this street and here's this old Vietnamese guy sitting out the front of his house with his bottle of rice whisky and we could see his eyes light up and he kept calling us over and we went over and he

15:30 spoke a little bit of English he wanted some of our booze and, "No, no, no." and he offered us his. So we sat there for about half an hour and then we went inside. At that stage we were all still armed and drunken armed soldiers - not a good idea - but we went inside and we sat down and he called his daughter out and she went out and got all the fixings and we sat there and ate hepatitis rolls

16:00 and drank his booze and he drank our booze and everybody drank somebody else's booze and it was a really good night so as we were leaving I gave the girl \$20 in MPC [Military Personnel Currency] to sort of reimburse her for the cost of the food and you should have seen her eyes light up. I probably could have got her for that as well. But you know that was good and I never sick from their food. I got sick and hospitalised for a couple of days from American food from the American hotel I lived in and that was

16:30 and that was normally pretty good but I got food poisoning from there. The big drive up through Saigon in the ambulance and everything. I was sick as a dog.

So when you were staying at Canberra what would you be eating primarily?

Well you, the deal was you would go and buy your evening meal and so at the Capitol, the American hotel and our bus would drop you off there and you could get a taxi

17:00 or something back. A lot of us used to use the cowboys, young Vietnamese blokes on motor bikes and that was one way of showing that nothing worried you so after Tet you would be there with your rifle slung across your lap sitting on the back of a little motor bike haring through the bloody traffic to the Canberra Hotel or you might be out at a bar and you get five or six of you and you each grab a cowboy [driver]

17:30 and the bloke that gets back first gets paid. I don't know how we lived through that but nobody ever come off but it was always a quick ride.

Did any of the blokes ever have trouble with the cowboys?

Yeah, yeah a couple of times. You get some drunk that didn't want to pay. We never had anybody seriously hurt but there's a couple of times and there's occasion there would be a fight in a bar and

18:00 some girls taken some of your money that she's not supposed to touch and...

What about with the white mice [Vietnamese police]?

You didn't muck with them. The big intersection there at one stage this little cop. They weren't very big but they rode these bloody great Harleys, really proud of their nice clean uniforms and they wore this big leather belt with the back support

18:30 and this bloke's directing the traffic and everybody stopped and he let them through one street at a time and this Vietnamese bloke in a truck kept edging forward. He blew the whistle and pointed at him to stop and once the whistle blew you stopped because they are supposed to do three blasts of a whistle and shoot. Some of them got confused what should come first or second, the whistle or the

19:00 shot, and this bloke kept easing forward in his truck and he was almost a full truck length out into this big round intersection and the cop shot him and bang and here his is dead in the truck and that was enough for me. I thought to myself, "Self, you don't want to do that." They didn't muck about.

Do you know of any blokes that got into strife with those guys?

19:30 Not in Saigon, no. We had a couple of blokes that got in trouble with our MPs but usually if you needed a ride you could flag down an MP and they would take you back but the only MP I knew there was a decent bloke. two of them I knew they were okay and when I got back to Australia the MP corporal was the sergeant at the jungle training centre

20:00 and the other bloke I've seen since them. He's not in the military any more. He got kicked out. They frowned on him shooting a beer glass out of a blokes hand in the MPs mess in Townsville. He was also I think champion pistol shot in the army and some bloke said, "I bet you can't shoot a glass out of my hand." and he shouldn't have even had the gun in the mess but he did and he shot it out of his hand. He got in

20:30 trouble for that.

What did the army teach you about, culturally about the Vietnamese before you went over there?

Nothing really. We were told to respect their culture and that they are a family-orientated thing and as the people get older the younger generation come through and look after them and that's why they are so family orientated. It sort of preserves the care for the elderly

21:00 and you shouldn't belittle them for that sort of thing. The Yanks didn't seem to worry too much about anything. "We are Americans and do what we like." basically. From what you read in military books about around Nui Dat the Australians went out and did the right thing by most of them in the villages and so on but in Saigon

21:30 very little trouble for the year I was there with the locals as far as ill treated or anything like is concerned.

Do you find yourself being attracted to learn more about the culture once you are actually there?

A little yeah. When my girlfriend was selected for me in the American hotel, her name was Day, it was Dai or Day I can't remember

22:00 and after the Tet Offensive died down I was allowed to take her out and we went to the movies and I was really wrapped in this girl and I would have given thought I suppose at some stage of bringing her home which nine out of 10 times not a good idea but she explained a lot to me about the family way of

life there and I lost her for a long time during the Tet

22:30 Offensive because their house was one of the ones that was blown up during Tet and she had a couple of marks on her face from it but she was a Catholic girl see and the third time I took her out to the movies I got to hold her hand. The fourth time I got to kiss her and that was as far as we went but she explained about what the system is with the young ones looking after the old and so on

23:00 I think a lot of them that are out here now are losing that but it's a good system for them over there and it seems to work. They've got their Buddhists. There was a Buddhist Temple next door to the Australian headquarters and it was under construction and they stopped that and they weren't really appreciative of us being there and they put this bloody great claymore

23:30 mine type bomb on the site and somebody stopped it but they stopped and sort of finishing the construction of their temple next door so I suppose they were a bit anti everybody really but it didn't make a lot of difference.

I read that the Tet Offensive politically was a success by the Vietnamese against the Americans but the amount killed by the Americans

24:00 **and Allies there was actually a failure there. How did you see things from the ground in Saigon?**

That's pretty right. Politically and as far as stopping the war was concerned they won on that because they showed they had the ability to strike countrywide and pretty well coordinated. On the military side they got the shit kicked out of them and

24:30 this American, I've got this article there somewhere saying, "We won that war. The Yanks were never defeated in any significant battle. We had companies take a lot of casualties but in significant battles we were never defeated on a purely military side we won that." Now I don't know if that was correct or not but there was a thing in SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] a couple of nights ago.

25:00 One of those travel shows, I don't think it was SBS it might have been one of those other channels. I can't remember whether it was seven or nine and this woman was in Hanoi and just a comment she made, "A majority of the population in North Vietnam is under 35." Now

25:30 why aren't there more people there my age. They are all dead aren't they. You see they would have had people my age and younger in the Vietnamese Army and in the Viet Cong and the lack of significant numbers there of my age group shows that they lost one hell of a life. I mean, you drop napalm

26:00 on something, it's affective. A bloke I used to work with in a training team and I don't know how much of the story is bullshit but him and his Vietnamese company were running away from a hell of a lot of North Vietnamese and he said he always kept the handset for the radio on his own shoulder and that way his radio carrier

26:30 couldn't get away from his and this particular day I was in front of him and I would have got away from me if he didn't have the radio his back. They went through this valley and they went through each side and he called in a couple of phantom strikes and they killed three or 400 VC or NVA because they are a fearsome thing those mini guns they used.

27:00 You used to see them at night and you've got a machine gun with six or eight barrels and every fifth round is a tracer there is an unbroken stream of fire and they are electronically driven and they used to put four or five of them different calibres into an old C47 [Douglas C47 Dakota bomber] and they could switch off

27:30 and glide in and you wouldn't even know they were there.

Did you see these guys the puff magic dragons [AC-47D gunships] flying around, over Saigon?

Yeah, yeah.

What else did you see militarily from your spot in Saigon?

I was walking down the street one day after the Tet. All this happened after the Tet and about 300 yards down the street there was this massive explosion and I stood still

28:00 you see there are times the first bomb goes off and the crowd gathers and then another one goes off and I stood there for about 10 minutes and then moved down it was a Nationalist Chinese Information Centre and it was anti-Communist and it was a corner building and the Viet Cong sabres [F100 Super Sabre fighter] had just blown this corner building right out and there was probably about three levels high and the buildings either side

28:30 that joined it were still standing and hardly a mark on their brickwork. They just blew the hell out of it but I didn't know at the time until about eight years ago when I was talking to a mate of mine and he was walking the opposite direction to me and he did the same thing coming from his direction and I didn't even see him there

- 29:00 but we were going through the rubble looking for people and this big Negro come out covered in dust and the tears running down his cheeks and he was carrying a baby. The kid was dead. That was, that's dark. There was probably four or five dead in the thing but the little baby was worse and one night the hotel got shot up.
- 29:30 Down the road from us a fair bit there was a Vietnamese Police Station and the VC were trying to blow it up and so on and apart from that it was relatively quiet and I'm sort of huddled on the roof of our hotel watching the pretty lights basically. Old F100 Super Sabres. I didn't realise they were still going
- 30:00 and they came over and they are firing mini guns. You know 40mm, 45mm cannons. The big bullets and just a massive fire comes out the front of these things and you know this went on for two or three hours and then about midnight, just past midnight I suppose I was in bed and a machine gun opened up out the front of the hotel and what had happened, our sigs bloke used to come home at night. We had a signal squadron at the back of the Headquarters
- 30:30 and they had a AR [Automatic Rifle] which is basically a heavy barrel version of the SLR with a bipod. The guy would come in he would leave that with the guard at the door who was usually infantry and they would have a week or two up there from a battalion and he'd take the blokes whatever weapon he had and he'd take the LR back in the morning. That all worked pretty well. Well this night the guard was a
- 31:00 battalion cook I believe and here's the VC coming home after shooting up this police station and he get half way across the road in front of our place and the guard calls out, "Halt." And the first bloke pulled up an AK47 and the bloke shot him. Nearly cut him in half so he's lying dead on the road and there's a couple of hand grenades
- 31:30 and a couple of rockets and a lot of bullets and that Wally, my roommate and I at this stage wide awake pulling on boots thinking we are finally in shit here and went outside and crawled from one end of the veranda to the other. There was a balcony sort of thing out the front. From one end of that to the other looking for someone to shoot at and couldn't see anyone and these two blokes came out
- 32:00 and started to drag away the body and the guard yelled out, "Two persons come out and removing the body." and the infantry commander for some reason said, "Don't shoot, they might be ARVN." They are dressed in the proverbial black and the ARVN wouldn't have gone out in the middle of a fire fight to drag a VC body back so instead of getting three there was one and they took the body away and we found it a mile or so down the road the next day.
- 32:30 So they could have got three. You know the adrenalins pumping there after that. It was a hell of a lot of shit in Saigon at this stage. There was this massive area blown apart and blackened. Blackened by fire. There was the fish market was an area
- 33:00 to stay away from and under the racecourse they had a tunnel complex. A hospital under there and they had been able to do this under the eyes of the Americans, the Vietnamese army anyone else that was in the area. So you just didn't know what you were going to be up against and there were people we had guards on the Headquarters at work and
- 33:30 I'm sure that a couple of times we saw North Vietnamese army on the street outside but we were not allowed to shoot unless we were shot at first. We were ordered then to return fire. There was a block across the street in a building occasionally fired a shot at us in the afternoon and one of the blokes on guard had been a machine gunner with seven Battalion, "I've got him spotted we'll knock
- 34:00 him over." and the ops [operations] major there and he said, "No, no, no. He's not hitting anybody. Let him go." And there was a bit logic there to I suppose. What he was doing was the minimum effort. Token effort type of thing. Fire a shot, not hitting anyone. If they had killed him he might have been replaced by someone who could shoot or
- 34:30 wanted to kill somebody and it wouldn't have been hard to do. One level there on the balcony he would have been able to shoot down a bit at them. From the others he had to shoot up. You know he never even hit the building so he wasn't real keen and that was good.

What was your impression of the Americans?

Some of them were okay.

- 35:00 A lot of the marines that I met were okay. A lot of the general army blokes I didn't like all that much and a lot of the Americans it was, "Back home we got..." and that's annoying and there was a movie out years ago called The Ugly American and about one of the American ambassadors or something like this and that's what a lot of it is.
- 35:30 They are terribly patriotic there's not any worries about that but a lot of them don't seem to have a lot of common sense of the world and they're strutting around Vietnam and a lot of them are getting killed through their own stupidity. You don't go out on a patrol with a machine gun slung over your shoulder playing your trannie [transistor radio].
- 36:00 Little things like that but there were some very good units but a lot of the general army just weren't well enough trained. Our people were. Particularly our infantry. You just got to admire those people so

much for what they did and where they went and the ability of the artillery people to put the stuff in the right place.

- 36:30 Little things like that and it was just so bloody important and the ability of our engineers to build something out of nothing and the armoured people who went out and helped D Company. They took them out and swam those things where they shouldn't have. But I don't know it's the skills were so much better for Australia.

A lot of blokes I've asked that question to

- 37:00 **both Vietnam blokes and World War II blokes generally say individually great put them in a group and totally different story.**

That's pretty right yeah. They were so racist. I was sitting in a bar one afternoon because this mate of mine had fallen in love with a Vietnamese girl and he'd gone home to see if she was still home and she was pretty pleased with herself because she was allegedly married to this American

- 37:30 and this was the first time that she cheated on him. But she was gorgeous and I was in the bar there and here's this Yank and he was from Texas or Alabama or something like that and this Negro came in and, "Hey mate, come and have a beer." And this bloke, "You are going to drink with a Nigger." "What's wrong with that? He's black,

- 38:00 I'm white. We're all in the same situation." "I'm leaving." And he didn't want to have anything to do with this bloke because he was black and they're both wearing the same uniform. "How would you like it if your daughter was married to one?" and I said, "Well as long as you weren't one of the neighbours it wouldn't worry me too much." And this is the thing. It's an individual thing. Some of the blokes were mongrels and some of the whites were mongrels so it doesn't really

- 38:30 matter and I walked into a bar one night and there was about 20 Harley Davidsons [motorbikes] parked out the front and I walked in there and I was the only white guy there, you know, it was a Negro motorcycle gang. American servicemen and the whole bloody bar stopped and I said to myself, "Self, you are in the shit here." and it was too late to go anywhere because I was well inside before I could see anything it was pretty dark

- 39:00 and of course they didn't reflect a lot of light and, "Have a beer thanks." and this bloke said, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "I've come in for a beer. It's a bar." "Don't you know this is a black bar?" and I'm thinking, "What's a black bar?" "Do you see any white men in here." "No." "Well it's a black bar." "Well I didn't know that. Does that mean I can't get a beer?" I'm thinking I'll going to be lucky

- 39:30 to get out of here alive and he said, "Don't you worry about drinking with Niggers?" "No, what's the problem? It's a beer isn't it?" "Where you from guy?" "I'm Australian." "Well I'll be goddamned." Well I couldn't buy a beer. The rest of the night they were filling me full of beer. I went back to the hotel on the back of a bloody Harley. I never went back there. I might be dumb but I'm not stupid but I had

- 40:00 a good night that night. But even in the service they are like that. It's not good.

Well just change tapes. Do you want to change or?

Tape 7

- 00:32 **We were just talking about what the Aussies thought of the Yanks. What do you think the Yanks thought of the Aussies?**

Overall they respected the ability and the standard of training we had before we went away. When 1st Battalion went over there they were living and working with the Yanks. I suppose overall American control but their CO

- 01:00 still had the final say on it and there were things that he wouldn't do with the Americans but they respected that and they had good results the Australians did and our area around Nui Dat. Our area of responsibility was a lot I suppose a lot better controlled than a lot of American areas

- 01:30 they respected Australians for that. I think overall I think the respect was there because of our training.

What about socially? You were telling us before sometimes the girls in the bars would have preferential treatment for the Yanks because they spent more money. Was there ever any social friction with the Yanks?

No the only time was when I called a marine friend of mine a 'jarhead'. A jarhead, I didn't know at the time, was a derogatory nickname for a marine.

- 02:00 They call them a jarhead because they reckon they used to put a jar on their head and cut their hair and that was basically it and this guy wanted to be a marine and he wasn't good enough and he took offence at me calling Fred a jarhead but Fred shut him down himself and he had to explain it to me and I didn't

understand that and that was the only time I had friction with them.

02:30 In a bar where they were getting most of the bar girls that didn't matter a shit really because they were the ones spending their money and you would think they were dickheads and I suppose for our dollar we got better quality time with the girls than they did with theirs because of the difference between us. For a start we weren't always trying to get hands up or down dressed which a lot of the Americans would.

03:00 There was that but very little friction I think between the troops.

Was there any sayings or slang that you hadn't heard before or you picked up from the Yanks?

Not really. Too much exposure to American movies and one term was 'trigger time'. When I used to go flying this

03:30 Yank said to me, "What are you trying to do get some trigger time up?" and that's basically time behind a firearm sort of thing but that was probably the only one. They had I can't recall any really. Not even with the guys I lived with in the American hotel. There was two Australians and two Americans, and the two Americans worked

04:00 in the mortuary at the airport and they came home smelling funny but they were pretty decent blokes.

They must have come home with pretty gruesome stories.

And a stack of weapons. In our room at one stage we had two or three AK47s, a couple of Chinese Communist ones. We had one machine gun there

04:30 that would fire belt or drums and I had a RP7 [Rocket Propelled] rocket launcher complete with rocket. You know just stuff they used to bring home and occasionally we would go to this Vietnamese indoor firing range and just set up and just fire all these Communist weapons and just have a bit of jippy shoot of the guns they brought home from the mortuary. And they didn't want to talk too much about it

05:00 what they had to do but you could smell the fluid on them when they came home and they had cleaned up before they came home. One was from Tennessee. I can't remember the other bloke. There was four of us in the same room and so I got called "Bobby Jack". My second name is John. The Australian named Bob was a fellow called Bob Gilliland and he was called grandfather because he had a moustache and to the Vietnamese

05:30 anyone who had a moustache was an old man. Bob Ellis was one American he just called Ellis and the other guy was someone was a Bob. Someone would come to the door and yell, "Hey Bob." and the four of us would answer. They weren't too bad those fellows.

What did they tell you about what they had to do?

Just the preparation of the bodies that were going home and a lot of them went home minus their insides

06:00 and sort of stuff because you get shot through the body it's probably not worth trying to keep all that in there. You are better off getting rid of that and destroying that on site rather than try and ship the whole body home. They would go home in a sealed casket but some of them have got to be suitable for viewing so they had to decide which weren't suitable for viewing when they got home and some that

06:30 could be they had to help prepare so that they could be suitable even though your undertaker back in the States was probably going to have the final say on it. I don't know there's much more they said really. It's not something we went into. Napalm they didn't like because there were Americans killed by that as well. They were probably the worse.

07:00 **You had said earlier that when you first got to Saigon you were a little disappointed in not being involved in more active service. After Tet what did you think?**

I was pretty thankful really that I wasn't. I fired my first shot on Christmas Day 1967. The American Red Cross had given the Australians a massive amount of what they

07:30 called 'ditty bags'. They were little cloth bags with a draw string full of little goodies from the Red Cross and we had a medium-size landing craft full of them in Saigon and they needed two Australians to ride shotgun [as guards] on them down to Vung Tau so myself and this other guy got the job so we went out there on Christmas Eve and slept on the boat that night

08:00 and went down to Vung Tau on the river on Christmas Day. We were sailing along happily and this Yank says, "Hey guys. There's some Cong." "What?" The river is miles wide. "Where?" He said, "Over there on the river bank." So I got the binoculars and there were three or four people there. "How do you know they are Cong?" "They are wearing black aren't they?" so he cleared it with the captain and we loaded up the machine gun and the first shot I fired

08:30 went out there and the second hit the water about 50 yards out and I've got no idea where the rest went. That thing just jumped around so much and I couldn't believe that I would have hit anybody anyhow. It was just so far away you weren't able to aim it but the only bullet that would have gone near

them was the first one. That was interesting. Not sort of terribly serious at that distance and we flew back to Saigon that night on the

09:00 Wallaby, the Australian Air Force, and that night I was on guard at the Free World Building when General Westmore turned up and they had a bit of Christmas drink downstairs with our general.

What did you think of the leaders that you were working with?

Some of them were pretty good. We had General Vincent there when I went there and since coming home I actually met his wife and he seemed

09:30 pretty good and then we had AL McDonald and I think they're both dead now but AL was only a little bloke but he from what he could see he seemed to have his shit together and officers spoke pretty highly of him and during the Tet Offensive there was an artillery battery at fire support base Coll and Balmoral outside the Nui Dat area

10:00 and I think 3 Battalion might have been there for support and I believe that that was probably the first time since the Second World War that they fixed bayonets because one of the guns was overrun and they took it back but I think the general was at Vung Tau or something when the first request come through and that came through on a flash signal which is the very highest priority we have and as a trainee

10:30 you never see one. I saw five of them that day. By the time the fifth come in the general had landed at the helipad out the back and was back in his office and then he came and sat in the com cen [communications centre] with the operators and ran it from there. It wasn't just a matter of you bring it up to him and give orders and have them transmitted he was there doing it and I think he was pretty well respected really.

11:00 The chief of staff that we had while I was there. A Colonel Griff that I met at Canungra afterwards and a Colonel Bradbury and they seemed okay. There were a couple of captains there I wouldn't have given you two bob for, you know, but I suppose they didn't have much more experience than I did and I had a big run in with one and it cost me a promotion. I shouldn't have won the argument I suppose.

11:30 **That was while you were there?**

Yeah, yeah but he's dead now. He died since he came home. It wasn't anything that I did but I might have given him a heart attack but I think in Saigon with a couple of exceptions most of the officers gave you a sense of confidence in them.

12:00 That's pretty important because quite often they are passing the orders down to the action areas like Nui Dat and so on but as far as the officers at Nui Dat went, I don't know. I think that every commander except one got a distinguished, what is it? A Distinguished Service Order when they came home. There was only the one as far as I know

12:30 that missed out on that. That was towards the end and they didn't have a real good run that year but I think most of them were okay.

Working in HQ [headquarters] you obviously had a fairly good idea of what was going on within Vietnam.

That's right.

What were you getting of what was happening at home?

The news broadcasts on telex

13:00 because we had a PR [public relations] section there and...

Can you actually just explain for posterity because we don't know who's going to be watching this when. Can you just explain the concept of telex?

It's a. How would you describe it? It's transmitted now. The Australians used to send a signal. Sent by radio. You type it into, basically,

13:30 you used to back there into what looked like a typewriter keyboard and a tape about an inch wide would come out of the other side of the machine with a series of holes punched into it and then you would feed that into a transmitting machine and that would send it from Australian to Saigon or wherever you wanted it to go just by those holes in the paper being in the right place and it would come into the machine in Saigon and produce another tape an inch wide with all the holes in it and it would

14:00 produce a hard paper copy about A4 width but a single continuous role with the written message on it and that's what it was called a signal most of the time by the army but so that's all that was and you see we would get those from Australian with news on it from the public relations people. The Yanks had a TV station and after a while

14:30 I don't know whether it started before or after I got there but one of our PR people would go out there and read probably 15 minutes of Australian news. I think some of it might have been censored a little bit but we used to be able to read it as it come in so we knew what was going on and stopping the mail

and so on and that's when that poster come out. It was basically a page drawn to resemble

- 15:00 a piece of paper torn with a big fist coming through it and written across the top of it 'A postie [postal worker] on RTA [Royal Transport Authority]' like return to Australia because they were stopping our mail. And the posties got upset about that so another one came out pacifying poster but that was a thing. It was very disheartening
- 15:30 for troops over there because the unions back here were taking it out on the troops. The university students were taking it out on the troops for a government decision see and that happened a little bit too with Timor I think or Afghanistan I'm not sure and I don't know about others but I came home hating unions. You could,
- 16:00 I didn't want to know about them and that was the people who were backing this and that's when they actually conscripted two ships. Was it the Monash? And I can't remember, Japarat it might have been. They conscripted two ships and they were loaded by servicemen to bring stores over and when they were taking the tanks over there were problems with that. They had to train wharfies
- 16:30 to drive them. I can't remember whether it was taking them over or bringing them back to take them off the ship. Things like that. Totally ridiculous.

Were the posties actually not delivering your mail in protest?

Yeah they were stopping it and then someone would come through and stop it again.

And what do you think that did for the state of mind that was in Vietnam?

It was demoralising in one way.

- 17:00 It probably resulted in a lot like me having a low hate for unions and but at the same time you felt well stuff them. We are here to do this and we will do it regardless of what they say and what they think and the university students with their throwing red paint on people and so on and defacing war memorials. It probably made a lot of people more
- 17:30 determined to do their job but as the same time it can be a little bit demoralising that your own people would do this.

Did you think it increased the camaraderie?

I think it did yeah. It was senseless back here to do it. It was you know they've got the right to demonstrate. There are no worries with that but I don't believe that have the right to demonstrate the way

- 18:00 they did. To deface say a war memorial to people in the First and Second World War and they are the people that gave them the right to demonstrate and they are defacing a memorial to those people and then to do the things that they did to us and we were sent there by a government. If you want to demonstrate against a government right the government makes the decision. Soldiers don't go away
- 18:30 and start a war. We never have and that's it. It's a government decision and we are to do what the government says.

When you were in Saigon were you ever, were there times when you wanted to be back at home or were you committed to being there?

You get lonely. There was one night I really wished I was back home because I was on duty. We had to have a duty person in

- 19:00 case something happened and they needed some particular file and I was there this night and I sort of just laid down to get comfortable and next thing there is a hell of a bang and windows rattled and so on and everything else is going on and then I realised it was mortars and it was so close I thought they were mortaring us. I reckon within
- 19:30 two seconds I had my steel hat and my flack jacket and I was sitting on the floor with my back to the wall. Not on the outside wall but my back to the wall next to me, to the room next to me with a steel helmets on either side of me because if I figured if a mortar hits this building it's probably going to fall down and that's the most terrifying thing ever and you can feel for people on either side of a war who have been shelled by mortars or artillery
- 20:00 or had bombs fall on them. There is nothing you can do to stop them. They are just going to fall and if you are under it well that's just bad luck. You know and that night I sort of wished I was home but after about 10 or 15 minutes of that I didn't hear any big noises from the people who were supposed to be on the veranda outside the office so I walked over and took my steel hat and my flack jacket off
- 20:30 and put my rifle down on the counter where it had all been, opened the door and here's all these blokes looking over the balcony looking towards the behind of our building where across this canal there was a gaol [prison]. And I said, "What's a bloke got to do to get some bloody sleep around here?" I wasn't worried but the VC were trying to blow a hole in the wall of the gaol to let some of their people out of there. But

- 21:00 sheer terror because there is nothing you can do to stop them and if you can imagine and I saw and felt them, a B52 [B52 bomber] raid you've got an aircraft seven miles above the ground. You can't even see or hear it and suddenly these bombs start falling around you. To me that would be as demoralising as anything you could come across.
- 21:30 Just carpet bombing. Hit an area and it might hit something effective or important was okay but you didn't know where they were or where they were coming from. The same as old spooky the C47 with all the mini guns on them. They were supposedly controlled by just one bloke who wore a helmet with a gun sight on them and where the helmet was facing that's where the guns fired and they varied in calibre from
- 22:00 5.56 to 0.5 inch and six or eight barrels and I don't know, I don't know how many rounds went but they reckon a three second burst would put one round in every square foot in a football field and that's a lot of bullets and you don't need to be under that and you don't hear them coming. They used to switch off the motors and glide in. Having seen them operate in daylight when they fired all those guns the whole aircraft would move sideways in the air.
- 22:30 There was such a recoil so stuff falling out of the sky it's not good particularly if you are underneath it. It's okay if you are up there dropping it and really most of the people up there never see the actual effects on the ground of what they've done and that can be pretty sobering.
- 23:00 When I used to go flying in this helicopter that was back when we started to get a day off a week again after the Tet Offensive and I met the air traffic controller at the pad down the back and I met a door gunner and then I met a pilot and then I met a general's aide and then I met the general and he said, "Sure you can come flying with us on your day off. Just bring your flak jacket
- 23:30 and of course your rifle." So the first day I turned up and I'm carrying a rifle and wearing a flak jacket and he said, "What are you wearing that for?" "You told me to, Sir." "No I told you to bring it. You sit on it. When you are up there the bullets are coming up, if you don't want two arseholes you sit on it." You know probably good thinking and I did that and I went up with them I don't know four or five times and went out in a rice paddy
- 24:00 and the general got out with a bandolier full of 45mm grenades for our 79 grenade launcher. It was an American weapon and the general's aide, he's got to look after the general's arse so he grabbed his rifle and he was out there with him and we come out of that and when the pilot took off we were just about cutting the rice with the rotors. He put so much power up it was head
- 24:30 down and tail up and away we went and a couple of weeks later I was doing nothing in particular and a bullet hole appeared in the bottom of the helicopter and that went straight through without hitting anything vital and I was happy with that. Well I better go back once more to show them I'm not scared anyhow we are flying around
- 25:00 and we got a call from an adviser on the ground to land at this village and this became very relevant because Jim Cairns a politician on the labour side wrote a book about the Vietnam War and about the demonstration side of things and one comment he made in that book was that the Americans had beaten the Viet Cong to such a degree that they have to sneak into a village at night to persuade the natives, the Vietnamese to help them.
- 25:30 And I saw how they did it. We landed there and the adviser took us into the village and here's the village head man dead on his bed. He had his head cut off, he had his head then stuck in his belly because they opened his belly up and they stuck his head in his belly and stuck his old fellow in his mouth and that's how they persuaded people. That alone sort of justified
- 26:00 being there. Anyhow that sticks with me a bit that one, and it took a while to get over that particular day because we were going back to Saigon and we got a call from the ground and there was an American adviser with say 100, 200 Vietnamese Army and they had this batch of scrub and bamboo
- 26:30 surrounded and they needed some fire so we are flying around in circles turning left and I'm sitting beside the gunner and he's giving fire support to them and then I felt this bang and the gunner had been shot through here see and, "Shit that was lucky." Lucky it wasn't me and once before
- 27:00 a bullet had gone past me and I had the same thought. That was good luck. Not for him but for me so the general's aide and the general took the gunner away from his gun to work on him and they told me to, "Get on the gun, get on the gun." So here I am an Australian private clerk on a machine gun out the door of an American helicopter where I shouldn't have been in the first place and that went on for about 20 minutes
- 27:30 practically non stop and the scared part was gone. The adrenalin was pumping and all you felt was I hope they go in the right place. Anyhow after it was over they landed there and they worked on the gunner before they took him back to hospital and they got 23 dead VC out of that and that was a sobering thought.
- 28:00 Because you are firing at something that you can't really see. You see a bit of movement and you are firing away and then you get on the ground and you see the results of the shooting and I'm not saying I

killed 23 people, I fired the bullets but the people on the ground was firing a lot of bullets to but there was a mate of mine who was a door gunner and he said, "You never get to land to see the results up close." and I never expected

28:30 to either. I never expected to get involved in anything like that to see the results up close and you think then what the infantry people have been through and they've had to pick up their mates and take them home and I never went with them after that.

What did you see when you landed?

What did I see? Shot up bodies and a 7.16 mm round makes a big impression on a body

29:00 particularly when it leaves it. We used to use as a demonstration in the army a 20 litre drum of water and fire a round of it and that thing would jump up in the air probably three or four ft and the whole back of it would blow out because the body is about 90 percent fluid you see, and practically the same thing happens to a body. It's usually not a big

29:30 entry wound but where it comes out is the mess because it takes a lot with it and so there's just a mess everywhere and there's bodies lying there with their bellies hanging out and half their bloody heads missing and things like that or an arm hanging off and yeah.

30:00 It wasn't good.

Can I ask you when you saw the enemy like that did they look like you expected them to look because you hardly ever saw them?

Pretty much mostly dressed in black clothes, aye. The difference was they are dead. What you do, I suppose, from there on in, you, well, I

30:30 don't know, I distanced myself from everything and everybody because if you are too close to someone you get hurt when something happens to them so you don't get close to anyone and you don't really allow yourself to feel anything for the Vietnamese because you don't want it to affect you in what you might have to do

31:00 so you look at it but you don't feel anything and this worked and it worked so well that I have trouble stopping it. I watched my mother die for six months with cancer and I felt practically nothing. I can't change that now see. You don't let yourself get emotionally involved because it can hurt too much

31:30 but I don't know how you stop it.

When you came back after that day considering that technically you shouldn't have really been there did you tell anyone about it?

Not for a long time. Nope. I think I told Fred the marine staff sergeant because he was about due to go home. He went home two or three months before me, two months before me.

32:00 I came home in December and he came home in October, early October and I told him about it before he went home. That was all. I didn't tell anyone Australian about it until years afterwards but I was worried that I might have got in some sort of shit for being there in the first place and I was a private soldier and I shouldn't have been there but quite often the Australians would go for a ride in the American helicopters. That's that adventure thing you see and the fact that

32:30 you are 10ft tall and bullet proof. That whole year in Saigon we had one Australian shot and he was wounded in the shoulder. He was standing up on the roof of the Australian hotel fully armed with a single lens Reflex camera and somebody shot him. He'd only been in the country a couple of weeks so he went home and go this free holiday on the Gold Coast that was the only one that got shot. We are 10ft and bullet proof. Even though

33:00 at times you were worried about where you were and what you were doing there and things and you learn that when you walk into a bar you never sit near the front or back door. You sit halfway along a wall and you still do that now. I got to a restaurant when I have to and I've got to sit behind a table against a wall. When I ride on a train. I can't ride on a crowded train.

33:30 I used to go to work early so I could get in the end carriage on the end seat or at worse the seat along the side against the door because I couldn't cope with people sitting behind me. When I go to the movies I go pretty well as soon as the theatre opens for the first screening so there's no crowds and I sit at the back so I don't have any people behind me

34:00 and that is a hangover from that. You know we did all sorts of I suppose reckless things to show that we weren't worried and whether we even realised we were doing it and in retrospect you can look back and see it but the worry was still there because at night a rocket from

34:30 across the road. There is nothing to stop them get up a building across the road and firing a rocket and it would have taken out a stack of our hotel and I had a room right at the front. One day during the Tet Offensive we were coming home in the second bus because it was going to the Capitol. Yeah the Capitol because I was living with the Americans and on the Canberra bus in front of us two Vietnamese came up

- 35:00 beside them and hooked a satchel on the wire screen. You see we had wire screens on the windows to stop them throwing bombs through there well these two fellows came up and hooked a bomb on the screen and of all people to notice it a little Warrant Officer Donny something or other and the last I saw him he was the secretary manager of the ANC[?] Football, and he was with the Australian Army audit team and he was over there I believe for the cash office. He was only in the country
- 35:30 for a couple of weeks and they hooked this bomb beside him and he sort of looked at it and didn't know what to do and he decided it shouldn't be there and he just flicked it up. It was only hooked on with a coat hanger sort of thing and he pushed it out and the firing mechanism broke otherwise it would have gone off beside the bus. Now that bus was packed. You're probably looking at
- 36:00 40 people, mainly 50 people seated and the aisle packed. Now that would have been the single loss of life we had over there except one bloke noticed it so that's there all the time so I don't like public transport. I don't like having people sit behind me and I'm not the only one that has it.
- 36:30 **That day on the helicopter. How long were you due to come was that?**
- Most probably mid-year so May or June.
- And how do you think that affected your day-to-day work after that?**
- I don't know that it did actually. I got back in my little office filing pieces of paper and you know
- 37:00 and then I shifted from that job into one where every signal or telex came into Saigon came over my desk and me and every guy had to register every one that came in and put a note where it had to go to and that's all I concentrated on and that and not getting emotional involved and not dehumanising the Vietnamese but not
- 37:30 looking at them so much as people as living bleeding sort of people. You just look at them and they are somebody that's there and there's no emotion about them. There's no real hate, there's no affection, there's nothing. You know and I think over the last 30 years that's screwed up my marriage too.
- 38:00 That lack of being able now to get close to people because I can't anymore. I was all right in the army because everyone was sort of the same and we understood each other and my mate Phil and I we were instructors with the Army Reserve and we used to train the trainer course for the Army Reserve at Wacol and we ran a couple for the coast guard just as a favour and we went
- 38:30 to Cairns one weekend and ran one up there for the Coast Guard and Phil kept saying, "This PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] is a load of bullshit. We wouldn't have that." And he nearly knocked me over to get the seat behind the table in the restaurant and I said, "You've got it." and he's now on a 100-percent pension and the way he's going, he'll be TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] before the end of the year and he had got it. I can see it in
- 39:00 him and I couldn't believe how I had it because I figured yeah, I accepted that PTSD as a genuine thing so there are some people that have PTSD. There are some that come home and then develop PTSD and there are some who come home and think there is a quid in this so they acquire PTSD
- 39:30 and there are people like me who come home and it had no affect and I really didn't think it had but my aunt in Crows Nest said from the day I come home she knew there was something wrong. You know I suppose when you look back you can see it now but it's not a good thing to have not just because of what it is, but to me there's a stigma attached to it.
- 40:00 When I worked for social security dole bludgers, sole parent pension cheats got bad names but that was only some of them.
- Just stop you there.**

Tape 8

- 00:30 So the dole bludgers in the sole parent cheats give all the genuine people a bad name and my job in Socials [Social Security] at one stage was just to make sure they got the right money, pension whatever it was. Whether it was more or less never concerned me. I never felt anything for any of them but PTSD I don't like to tell people about it.
- 01:00 People ask me know what I'm doing and I say I'm retired and because I was in the sergeant's mess in Wacol one night. They had formal dinner on and one of the guests was a major and here's this ex-regular army warrant officer, Viet vet [Vietnam veteran] standing there telling this major that he was going to retire at age 55 with PTSD because he read the book on it and he knew what symptoms he had to have
- 01:30 and I thought, "You bastard!" Apart from doing that mouthing off to a major as being well regarded by

everybody as being a dickhead and that was on a good day. To do that. You know that makes it, makes me feel worse about having it and it's,

- 02:00 you just don't tell people unless you really have to. It's not a good thing. It has screwed up my life. It screwed up my marriage. It will eventually screwed up my working life. When I finished work I was supposed to do four prosecution interviews a week. I was down to doing one in four weeks and I couldn't write it up and I've been lucky all through my time in the army because we sort of
- 02:30 looked after each other but you change jobs so often in the army that it's sort of...Instructor for two years in Puckapunyal, instructor for three years at Enoggera. A year and a half or so with AVA [Australian Veteran Affairs], two and a half with Army Reserve, three and a half with Canberra in probably three or four different jobs in that time and back to Brisbane as a chief clerk of a supply group
- 03:00 then a logistics bench and then with army welfare so its almost like a fresh start, but you can feel towards the end of each of those jobs that you are approaching burn out and now you can see that's why because it's starting to get at you and you needed a new job and I got out and with the public servant it was the same. I was on a review team
- 03:30 for years but you would do say eight -10 weeks of sole parent pension and then you 8-10 weeks of unemployment benefit and then 8-10 weeks of sickness benefit so you are getting a different and then I did I suppose of investigations. We used to be away one week in five and then I ran a team for 12 months and once again I was away one week in five
- 04:00 and towards the end of that I did a full year and we had the best results in Queensland. I had to two army blokes working from him and a women whose father had been a merchant marine and we all had that discipline and we did our job and then they disbanded us and then I went to be a trainer for two or three years and then prosecutions and the differences in the jobs and you know you get a new start.
- 04:30 In prosecutions there was nowhere else really to go except backwards and that's when the wheels fell off and then to hear this mongrel skiting about how he was going to retire with PTSD just makes you feel worse within yourself about having it.

You said for a long time being in Vietnam had had no affect on you. When did you realise?

- 05:00 My wife told me once a friend of hers worked in a hospital and she had this book. It was American issue thing something about a clinical persons approach to PTSD and treatment or something and she said her husband had it and my wife borrowed it and she read it and she said, "You're in this book." And I said, "Bullshit, what is it?"
- 05:30 Well one of my favourite sayings was, "I want to retire so far back in the mountains that nobody will ever find me. I want a road to get out, but I don't anybody to find me." And that apparently this American person, researcher or whatever said is a typical type of statement from veterans with PTSD. I just shrugged that off as being bullshit
- 06:00 and then I had to have some surgery. I had a problem in my bottom end and after that every time I went to the toilet I had to sit in a bloody bath, I was cut open, so bloody shocking. I'm sure you needed to know that, and this nurse said to me one day, "What do you do for a living?" and I said, "I'm a public servant." "Were you ever in the military?"
- 06:30 and I said, "I was in the army for 20-odd years." And she said, "You need to see a psychiatrist mate." And I said, "Bullshit." and she said, "No. I've been listening to your nightmares." And so I you know ignored that and then one day at work things got real bad and I rang up Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service and spoke to a woman there and she said, "Come up and see me."
- 07:00 and she was the only one there I ever trusted actually in that office. There were some to me some silly people in there and she took me in the office and she said, "Sit anywhere." and anyway I sat in this chair and she just grinned at me, "They all sit there." It was a seat in the corner and there was another chair the same in a different spot but that was the corner seat.
- 07:30 "All the boys with PTSD sit there." "No, I'm just having trouble coping." And I talked to her for a while and she said, "You really need to see a psychiatrist." and I went back to my GP [General Practitioner] and he referred me to a bloke in Strathpine who he ran a trauma course to help people cope with PTSD
- 08:00 and I went to see him and I spoke to him for an hour and he said, "Oh well, you're treatable but you are not curable." I said, "What have I got?" and he said, "You've got PTSD." And I said, "No, I don't know." I didn't want to have that. Anyhow that was eight years ago I suppose and I'm still seeing a psychiatrist once a month
- 08:30 and I'm not working and it's bloody...and I still have nightmares.

What sort of nightmares do you have?

Some of them I can't remember just that they're violent. Some of them people are trying to kill me. The worst one, there's two bad ones. I don't know what they relate to. I'm at the bottom of a cliff

- 09:00 and I can't get away from it and the slope away from it is a steep slope and its too slippery and I'm stuck against the bottom of this cliff and the slope in front of me is getting steeper and steeper and wetter and I can't get away. I'm just stuck against the cliff and that just builds up, and I don't know what happens after that and the other starts off with a pin and I don't know what that's about.
- 09:30 It starts off as a pin and the head gets bigger and bigger and bigger and it just become totally enormous and just engulfs me and then I wake up again but I've had ones where I'm shooting at people and people are shooting at me and some I don't remember. I've had a few about the village bloke with his head
- 10:00 in his belly, and but a lot of them I don't remember.
- Have you ever spoken to your wife and your kids about the things that you saw when you were there?**
- Well, to a degree. You never used to and because she said to me once, "I really don't know what your problems are because all you talk about is
- 10:30 drinking and sleeping with Vietnamese women." and I said, "You don't need to know the rest of it." And that's a thing to. You see, they don't. They weren't there so those here now shouldn't involve them. It was a long time ago, and some things I've tried to tell them and they're
- 11:00 hard to talk about and then I wrote those poems and I read these this is what's going on. This is what's happened but I think I left it too late. I don't have a good relationship with my wife or my oldest daughter. The youngest one is pretty good. It's too late now.
- 11:30 I've been suicidal at times and I probably shouldn't have all those guns in there but I would never shoot myself. That's not a thing. You know what a bullet is going to do so you don't do that. But I was set up one day and the thing is you are preparing for it and you know its wrong but you can't stop it. I was
- 12:00 going to hang myself and I'd spoken to a bloke who had tried the same thing and his rope had broken and he had marks around his neck where the rope had cut in before it had broken so I got a bigger rope and I made the noose and I wrote a poem about that, There are 13 Coils in a Hangman's Noose. I couldn't make it go 13, I got 12
- 12:30 and I had the noose tied and I had a tree picked out down the back paddock and the chair was there and I came in to write the note and my wife and kids came home from shopping on a Saturday afternoon. Now they never came home from shopping before the shops shut and that day they came home early for some reason otherwise I wouldn't be sitting here now talking to you and I knew it was wrong.
- 13:00 It wasn't the thing to do but there was nothing I could really do to stop myself doing it. It's the frustration. The frustration is probably leads to more depression than anything else with me. The frustration of not being able to do things. My wife says to me, "How come you can do what you want to do, but you can't do what I want to do?"
- 13:30 Something as simple as making a phone call and I say, "It's not the way it works, because I do what I want to do when I know I can do it." Go to the motor show and I got as far as the railway station and too many people on the train so I turned around and come home again, and things like that happen a fair bit. I find that I can get on a train in the middle of the day because they are not crowded
- 14:00 and you are pretty right. If I go on long distances I pay the extra and get a sleeper. I hate going into the city because there's too many people around. It's got to be really necessary before I go into the city and so I don't do what I want when I want to I do what I want when I can and I
- 14:30 can sit here sometimes and say I've got to do that bit of washing up that's out there and I don't know where to start it and that builds up the frustration and when money's a bit short and I'm better off than a lot of others. I've got my superannuation and my TPI, but we own 10 horses, you know, and three of them are purebred Arabs
- 15:00 and they cost money that I didn't have to pay out but we have to feed them and my youngest daughter has moved out and they are buying a house so she can't afford to contribute to horse feed anymore and she wanted to sell her horse and my wife said, "No I want to keep it." so we're still stuck with her horse but we're paying for the feed and it's frustration
- 15:30 that I can't do anything about the situation we are in. We've got the Arab filly down there. She's pregnant. The stud fees about \$2,500 and that's frustration because I couldn't talk my wife and eldest daughter out of doing that. You know, and I have a back paddock that's largely overgrown. I've got four broken pieces in my backbone from a bike smash
- 16:00 while I was with the aviation regiment so I have a lot of trouble swinging a brush cutter and a chainsaw and that's frustrating and you just get so damned depressed and at night when I can't go to sleep. Last night when I knew this was on today, I thought I'll have an early night and I did. I got to bed about midnight, quarter past but usually its about 2.00 and I wake up two or three times.
- 16:30 I sleep with a Sleep Ap [sleep apnoea] machine you know because I used to smoke and drink a lot.

Sometimes I still drink a lot but you're paying \$1.80 for a bottle of spirits you tend to and of course the alcohol deadens the worries when you are away and then you get to be a sergeant and you drink in the

17:00 sergeants' mess where the beer is cheaper and then you go to an army reserve sergeants' mess where it is cheaper still and you might go to your reserve army sergeants' mess on a night and a weekend so you probably get drunk while you are there. At Wacol I used to have my own private room and I had it set up in there so well, I used to take a little esky with some ice and buy a bottle of scotch

17:30 and had a TV there and everything and you'd sit there and you'd drink and you'd go to sleep early and you wouldn't dream as much. I know take a sleeping pill four nights a week so I can sleep properly and I get about six hours sleep on those nights without a dream and without waking up is important. The worst I ever did

18:00 I suppose was about seven or eight sleeping pills and I slept for 17 hours but I didn't dream and a mate of mine said to me, "Suicide is not an option, it's an escape." and sometimes it is, but it doesn't solve anything for the people who are still here. It probably would probably alienate them against your

18:30 memory and you don't want to do that either but sometimes it just gets out you...

How long was it after the war was it when your wife gave you that book when you were diagnosed?

I'd come home in '68. It was probably '88. It would 20-odd years, yeah.

Was there some element of relief involved that after 20-odd years

19:00 **to be able to at least have a name for it?**

I don't think so because other people had talked about having it and I didn't want it. I didn't want to have it. An ex-cop I know who I run across a few times when I was doing security work in the year after I left the army and started with the public service and I used to do

19:30 the guard work at Brisbane City Council Auctions, so here's him and me both walking around with a 357 magnum [hand gun] and we got talking a lot and he was getting out of the police force because of his PTSD and he was in Saigon at the pull out there in '71-'72 and he was on booze and drugs and all this sort of crap and I ran into him a few times after he got out of the force and

20:00 he got his TPI, and I met him one day in a pub in town and we were both there for the Friday lunchtime strip show actually. The old Alliance up on Leichhardt Street and he said, "Bas, how come you're drinking again?" and he just tapped his TPI badge and he said, "Miracle cure mate, miracle cure." And that's not right, either. How genuine is he?

20:30 So you don't. You see people like that, and you hear people like that warrant officer and you don't want to admit you've got it. You fight against having it. I could have finished work probably 12 months earlier than I did because the shrink [psychiatrist] said, "You can finish now if you want to. There's no worries."

21:00 And I said, "No, we'll keep on going." and I went as long as I could and but when the end it came pretty quickly. I was gone in a fortnight or so and I took a stack of leave and just never went back so yeah. So, I don't like admitting that I've got it. It's not a good thing.

21:30 **Do a lot of the guys that, a lot of Vietnam vets that you know suffer from it?**

I know in just the people I know I suppose locally there is one up the road. There's one down towards Redcliffe. There's another fellow at Tarragindi.

22:00 A couple of blokes up from Victoria and Tasmania up for Blues party and when I look now at other people I've known in sergeants' messes over the years you can so much of yourself in the way they acted and you know they've got it to.

Has it changed your view on the war at all and being there?

22:30 Not really. It doesn't matter anymore whether it was right or wrong. We did what we were told to do and that's what you do in the army. So I don't have any problems about anything I did there morally or personally. I don't have any problems about having been there. I have a problem with some of the things that happened there

23:00 and I have problems with the government that wiped us when we came home. You know so I have a few problems like that but not really about the fact of being there and the events that happened.

Can we go back and talk about the last couple of months that you were in Saigon?

Yeah.

So

23:30 **when you were in Saigon obviously had a very different experience because you were based in Saigon. What was your experience say of the guys that from Vung Tau and just came into**

Saigon for recreation?

You were called POGO [Person On Garrison Operations]. POGO stands for personnel on garrison operations and Saigon warriors

- 24:00 because they saw it as a gift sort of thing being in Saigon because of what you had there. Bars, booze, girls anything you want and the people at Nui Dat, they were at what was called 'the sharp end'. Vung Tau, I suppose, was somewhere between them but probably in the opinion
- 24:30 of the people at the sharp end almost the same as Saigon because it was basically a rest centre and it was a rest centre for the VC as well. Not a lot of trouble in Vung Tau and there was a lot of times we felt the same, but in my mind the Tet Offensive changed that because that drove home the risks and the dangers of being in Saigon
- 25:00 and everywhere you went then you were watching everybody even more than I was when I got there. You were watching and looking around all the time. You know there are so many people. If you are on an infantry patrol and you are going out into an area and at times they used to go out on operations and they would publicise the fact that they were going into an area to check it out and anyone found there would be treated as enemy
- 25:30 you can't do that in Saigon and if they found anyone quite often they were VC and they used to lie down in the bush and ambush people and they would be ambushed by people lying down in the bush but in a city the size of Saigon and with all the people there you don't know who was where. There could be somebody on top of a building. There could be someone riding along
- 26:00 on his pushbike or his motorbike or drop a hand grenade in the taxi with you or you could be driving along in your bus and somebody with a machine gun starts shooting at you. when General Vincent came home and General McDonald came over to take over we were at the airport at Ton San Nhut and just lounging about as soldiers do waiting for the General to get on the plane and go home and somebody started shooting a
- 26:30 machine gun from the other side of the airfield. You know there was bullets flying everywhere and there was an infantry corporal, he was a clerk but he was an infantry corporal and myself standing at the right-hand front wheel of the Land rover and he went around to the front, the left-hand front wheel to get two wheels and a motor between himself and whoever was shooting. I went around the back and I just beat him to that front wheel. It was so close. It's amazing how fast you can move
- 27:00 and the day we came home. We were standing there waiting for the 70 to come in and once again someone starting shooting from the other side of the airfield and even if we were armed it was too far away to shoot back. You saw some pretty snappy footwork that day too, and then eight hours later you are at home in Australia and you get to Sydney in the middle of the night basically
- 27:30 and then in the morning you catch a plane back to Brisbane and you're walking down George Street and there are cars and people everywhere and all of a sudden there is something flying out of a ute and you end up in the gutter, but it is only the paper bloke delivering the papers to the seller on the corner. Once I quietened myself down I felt like a real idiot, but I thought it was a bomb. You know, no time to
- 28:00 adjust really. That was the problem, and even the troops that came home on the Sydney, that was only a couple of weeks at most. Still no time to adjust.

You were talking before about that at one point you may have briefly considered bringing home a Vietnamese girl that you met. Did that happen much?

Not a lot.

- 28:30 Our intelligence bloke and interpreter brought one home. A lovely girl Tue Wet and she worked on the telephone exchange. Military exchange, and he brought her back and they got married. I think it stuffed him up really as far as nitty gritty intelligence work went, but they were used in the language school and translators and all this
- 29:00 and when the boat people started coming they went to Malaya, I think, to work with a lot of the alleged refugees to try to sort out who were and who weren't, and I've only run into him once or twice since then and they seem pretty happy and she was a lovely girl. On the other hand I saw a National Serviceman over there who brought home
- 29:30 I suppose a female and she worked in 100p alley which was I suppose the equivalent of \$1 and it was an alley of bars and brothels I suppose out near Ton San Nhut Airport and you could get any exotic brand of VD there you wanted for about \$1, and this bird, I saw her at the headquarters and the makeup was caked on to cover up the face
- 30:00 and the hair was combed down over one eye because she couldn't see out the one eye and she had been working as a prostitute for years and that's where he met her and that caused a big stink at the time, but I think he got her home. Your stuck with that, aren't you? And it's not a good idea. For some it works and some it doesn't,
- 30:30 and I thought at the time she was using him as a ticket to get out of Vietnam and that's probably what it

was and there's a lot of girls that would have done that. I don't believe there were just too many that brought girls home. Some of the reasons the girl gave me that she has to stay there and look after her parents so that her children will look after her and you think back on it would it have worked in the long term

31:00 anyhow and quite possibly it wouldn't so your better off not thinking too seriously about it but she was a really nice girl.

You mentioned VD a moment ago. Was it rife?

It was depending a lot of where you went. If you went around I suppose back alleys and

31:30 into got yourself picked up by some girl on the street or some kid sold you his sister, probably a lot.

Were condoms readily available?

Oh God yeah, and I used them every time, but this one girl, the \$75 one, "You don't need that with me." And perhaps I didn't, but I don't know. It's probably

32:00 best not to know.

Did you get them issued by the army or did you have to go and buy them?

Go to the OP [Observation Post] and ask for them. Actually, there was one girl there I didn't use it with and I met her by accident and she was French Vietnamese. Her father was a French schoolteacher and her mother was Vietnamese and I was at Vung Tau at the street of bars at the flags. The flags of the free world countries were spread there at the end of the street and I was walking

32:30 backwards to get them all in frame for a photograph and I stood on this girl and I said, "I'm sorry." And she said, "That's all right, I wasn't watching." "You speak good English." "I'm not Vietnamese." and her name was Mai Le. We talked for about half an hour. "Can I buy you a drink, a coffee, anything at all?" "Come home and met Dad and Mum." so we went back to her place and he brought out his black market American beer and we had dinner there and

33:00 I said, "Well I suppose I'd better be getting back." And he said, "Aren't you staying the night?" "I beg your pardon?" "When Mai Le brought you home, I thought you were staying the night." This is his daughter he's talking about. "Are you sure about this?" "We are in a war. All of us could be dead tonight, tomorrow. If this is what she wants, I won't argue with her." So

33:30 apparently she'd done it before, and I don't know if it was a regular thing so two nights later or two days later I got back. It was a lovely time and I never used a condom with her but I should of for her I suppose in retrospect but I caught nothing and that was the only one.

Her parents seemed very liberal. What was the general, what was your impression of the elder generation of Vietnamese what they thought

34:00 **of all the servicemen being there and the prostitution?**

You could sometimes in their eyes that they've seen it all before and that's it. It's nothing new. They've been at war for 1,000 years basically. There was always somebody invading there. They've all lived through it

34:30 and they've probably done the same thing themselves as younger people and now their younger people are doing it and there are still prostitutes over there even though the government says there aren't. There are. A mate of mine has been back three times and there's a bar in Vung Tau owned by an Australian and he said, he met up with a group of blokes there and he said that some of them looked a little sheepish the next morning

35:00 because they had been to bed with the bar girls and most of these are married blokes and I said, "What about you?" and, "No. Not anymore." and that's the thing you see. The Russians are there now in Vung Tau so things haven't changed that way. For a while though they are not having a war

35:30 and all the ones that the NVA wanted to put through the retraining camps they've all done that. I met a bloke a couple of weeks ago that has been back 160 something times. He was running tours back through there but I'd like to go back and have a look at it just to have a look.

36:00 It's, I don't know, but even if you went back you can't get involved with the people. That's what it comes down to. You can get it here in Australia as easily as you get it over there I guess now. Go down the Valley [Fortitude Valley] and have a walk around New Farm.

Did you, you knew when you got there that you were basically there for 365 days.

36:30 **Were you counting down towards the end?**

Well we had until they got banded things called Fimos and this was usually a picture of a well built naked female and the whole picture was broken down in 365 pieces with the number one or it might have been the zero I can't remember now

- 37:00 being right in her groin area and every day you would cross out another square and then somebody at home found out about it and some women's group complained and the word came out you weren't allowed to have them anymore.
- Where did you get them from?**
- Just generally available that's all. You'd buy an American Penthouse or something like that and someone would copy it for you. That was it yeah. But I
- 37:30 was there a bit longer. I was there 53 weeks and that's what nearly got me shot on the last day see. I was due to come home. I come home the 3rd December. I was due to come home the week before and my chief clerk said to me, "Bob you are due to go home next Tuesday." "I'm already packed." "Well, got a bit of a hiccup." "Oh yeah?" "You know young Sam is supposed to go home next week, too." And I said, "Yeah."
- 38:00 "Well there are no seats left on the plane." "Oh shit, that's bad luck. Sam will have to stay another week." "Well that's what I want to talk to you about. You're a reg and Sam's a Nasho." I wasn't happy with Sam anyhow because he got the stripes I was supposed to get and I said, "Yeah." "Well it wouldn't look good if Sam had to stay an extra week and something happened to him and we sent a reg home before him instead of him."
- 38:30 And I said, "What if I get killed next week? My Mum's going to be upset." "Well I'd like you to stay. I don't want to order you to. I want you to stay and besides you make better coffee." So I stayed the extra week and they wouldn't have hit him at the airport anyhow. He was too bloody short. He was only a little bugger about that
- 39:00 and me and a stack of other fellows nearly got shot that day. So I did the extra week.

What was it like to saying goodbye to Vietnam?

Not a problem. Not a problem. Gave a cheer when we left the ground. Massive cheer. 707 full of Australians going home and then the cheer when we landed in Sydney.

- 39:30 It would have been nicer if it could have been in daytime but I suppose they didn't want us there in daytime. But it was a hell of a cheer when we hit there and we got through customs and I got this hand-carved chess set. A wooden set and he took every piece out of that and poked at it with needles to see if it was hiding something. I don't know where and a couple of cartons of cigarettes and he only opened
- 40:00 one packet of that and I had a litre and a half of some American, probably Chivas Regal. Some American whisky. No where does Chivas come from, is it Canadian? It was about a litre and a half. More than you are allowed and he said, "Oh bugger it. Go for it." So that was that and suddenly you are home what am I going to do now?

I'll stop you there

- 40:30 **at that point.**

Tape 9

- 00:31 **With the choppers going up the American chopper the Iroquois. A lot of blokes they hear Iroquois and say it takes them straight back.**

It makes your hair stand up it really does. It's not a fear thing with the Iroquois [helicopter] it's just a real spooky feeling. There's just nothing like them. I ridden in a Black Hawk [Black Hawk helicopter] and

- 01:00 they are magnificent machine but they are not an Iroquois and I love them and I think most of the infantry people do to although the Iroquois often took them out into trouble spots they often brought them back too. That was the big thing. They are good.

Are there any other things that just take you back straight away? Smells or sounds?

- 01:30 Well sometimes the last time really was in a bloody in a retail fish outlet and it took me back to the fish market in Saigon but it wasn't a bad a smell. Sometimes just a word or a scene of a movie or something will remind you of it and

- 02:00 sometimes you run into somebody you knew and that will take you back and at night sometimes when you don't want to be back there that's when you are back. So it's sometimes it comes.

Do you find that you avoid watching war films, particularly Vietnam war films or?

I don't go out of my way to see them. I went and saw Forest Gump but only because

- 02:30 only a little war scene in that but from my experience that was pretty near accurate with the noise and confusion and I'm not a big fan of war films. I'll watch something like Clint Eastwood because although it's violent you know it's not real violence and Terminator and that sort of thing because that's ridiculous violence
- 03:00 and sometimes you see people getting shot out like Sylvester Stallone in some of his movies. The Rambo ones but they are so ridiculous to be laughable too, but you see people getting shot at four or five times with machine guns shooting at a guy and he out shoots them with a magnum pistol or some damn thing so
- 03:30 you can watch that sort of stuff but I'm not a real fan anymore of war films. No.

What about did married guys often go to the brothels as well?

Well some did. I know probably more than never that did but one bloke that knew he used to have what was called a PCOD – pussy cut off date, and you never went out to a brothel after

- 04:00 that because you had to have your test before you came home and so on and make sure you had nothing and you just didn't do anything after that date well this bloke did and he went to go home on R & R and he started to drip as he got off the plane so he went straight from there to Watsons Bay and his wife met him of course and he said, "I've got a kidney problem. I've got to go to the doctor."
- 04:30 and he went out there and said what had happened and crystallised penicillin in the arse. So he used a condom at home like he should have done when he was over there.

Do you have a story about a warrant officer that got himself in a bit of strife getting VD?

That would be him. Yeah. That would have to be the bloke.

- 05:00 He shouldn't have gone out but there was another soldier I knew who was kept back over there because he developed a strain of VD that wasn't responding to treatment and he was only a young bloke. It was bad. You could see the fingernail marks in the toilet wall. The pain...but he went across the road because there was this little establishment across the road from the hotel
- 05:30 and all the girls were busy so he took the old mamasan. He should know better than that, but this other guy was probably the warrant officer.

What about did you ever see or experience the steam and creams?

Oh yes.

Can you tell us about those?

Well yeah it was different. They'd have a steam bath, sauna thing on top of some of the

- 06:00 hotels because they were quite reasonable establishments at one stage and this one was about 14 storeys high and on top of it was the steam bath and a little pool and all that and I went up there this \$75 girl, the girl I'd had a lot of fun with previously was lying up there wearing the bottom half of the bikini and a welcoming smile
- 06:30 and, "Steam bath?" "All right." And that was it you got steam bath and your knob polished and that was steam and cream. It was normally only oral sex you know. You didn't sort of get anything else so it was over quickly.

What about there is a Kiwi bloke that had a red mustang?

The red mustang. He worked

- 07:00 I believe at the New Zealand Embassy and he lived there. He had his own apartment in Saigon and he was a corporal in the New Zealand Army and he had a red mustang and he used to drive his girls around in that. A bloody convertible mustang. Unbelievable. A mate of mine had his own American jeep that he picked up and another mate of mine bought his own motorbike but this bloke had a red mustang.
- 07:30 That was class I thought. Really good.

Were there any times that you felt like you would have to use the .45 that you were carrying around when you were out in ?

There were a couple of nervous times yeah. A few of us laughed and joked about this because you never thought that you would but you always had to be prepared just in case so you always went in the left-hand pocket with the barrel facing upwards

- 08:00 and that way you could reach into your pocket, pick it up by the barrel, put it in your right hand all in one motion and because you weren't silly enough to have one up the spout in case the hammer got caught in something and you ended up shooting yourself but there was an incident when I was sitting in a kamikaze and we got held up at some traffic and there are a couple

- 08:30 of unfriendly looking Vietnamese blokes there and yelling something and the bloke driving the kamikaze said to me, "Maybe VC." so I got the gun out and cocked it and just held it on my right knee and we moved off there but that was probably the worse. There was another time in a taxi when I was nervous for no reason at all and that went to. It was always good to have it there.
- 09:00 **Did you ever see any Australian civilians?**
- We had a female band visit us one night and that was really. They were a mob of bitches really. They weren't terribly friendly. They only put on a real short show for us and this was at the Capitol Hotel and they started to sing and somebody yelled out something nice like, "Show us your tits." and
- 09:30 they threatened to quit and walk off if that sort of behaviour went on and a bloke who's nickname was 'Brutal' said to them, "Do you reckon you can get out of here in one piece?" and they put on a real good show for us that night. No one touched them or anything but it certainly put the fear into them. Brutal was a massive bloke. Shoulders like you never saw. He used to do weight lifting of an afternoon and he'd go into
- 10:00 the Vietnamese gym and weight lifting and he'd pick up one of the walking planks with a couple of Vietnamese on each end of it. He was a good bloke.
- Were they the only Australian civilians that you saw there?**
- Yeah, yeah. That I can remember. There was one old lady who looked like Phyllis Dilla. Tassy, Tassy Hamilton
- 10:30 her name was. Oh God what a dag, but she was just so much Phyllis Dilla but it was all done with an Australian accent and she was really good. Loved her.
- Did you see any other important people from Australia like politicians and that in Saigon?**
- No. There was probably not a good year for them to be there, '68, people were getting shot. The year before
- 11:00 would have been all right but you didn't want to be there in '68. No, I didn't see any politicians in Saigon at all.
- What about Aussie journalists and photographers and things?**
- Not civilians no. Not that I'm aware of. They might have walked into their headquarters in civvies and thought they were on a day off. We had two or three Australian Army PR blokes there but they are the only ones I ever saw.
- 11:30 **In the job that you had you must have seen the whole body count thing what was your impression of that?**
- It put you down a bit when you saw yours coming through but overall we were in front basically and that was always good but there were other things. They talk about Agent Orange [herbicide used in Vietnam]
- 12:00 and I used to see After Action Reports come in from people like the SAS [Special Air Service] and they were very detailed in what they wrote and I was one of a group of people in Canberra who went through the war memorial annex looking for files and I found pieces of paper in files there that I had actually filed in '68. But there were reports that indicated that they had moved into a newly defoliated
- 12:30 area and one or the other. There might have only been three or four people in the patrol but one or more of them would develop say sinus or eye troubles or throat troubles and they'd have to be extracted because you can't go through the weeds sniffing all the time. It certainly had an affect and I've had too many mates that were over there that have died of cancer who'd believe anything different.
- 13:00 **What about R & C [Rest and Care]?**
- That's where I met Mai Le, in R & C in Vung Tau. Just the once. That was a good little town. It's pretty friendly. There were some lovely bars but she was the highlight of R & C.
- What about R & R?**
- I came home.
- 13:30 A school mate of mine was getting married and I'd introduced them so I came home.
- That would have required special permission did it?**
- No you had a choice of Australia, Hong Kong, Taipei or Bangkok and I think Singapore might have been in it too. If I think back now I would have loved to have gone to Bangkok. I had mates that went there.
- 14:00 The people are fantastic and the girls are even better than the good looking Vietnamese ones and they were just wrapped in it.

How did you go with correspondence at the time?

I used to send home letter tapes so I brought two little variable speed tape recorders and sent those home and there was that and the normal snail mail sort of thing.

- 14:30 I never rang up. Sometimes you could go to the local post office, the telephone exchange and you'd be lucky to get through but apart from when the posties were holding up the mail we never had any real problems. I got plenty of mail.

What about care packages and red cross parcels and things like that?

I don't think we got any in Saigon. We didn't really have a need for it because we had access to all the care we needed if you paid for it.

- 15:00 I think I got a couple of packages and when I went back from R & R I was a bit of a hero in Saigon there for a couple of weeks because I took back I can't remember whether it was two dozen or four dozen frozen meat pies and they were still frozen when I got there and I distributed them around the headquarters and here we are sitting there eating Australian meat

- 15:30 pies. People couldn't believe it and I bought them from a pie shop in Toowoomba and I told them when I got there what I wanted, why I wanted it so they had them done and they were frozen for me to pick up and I got them for bugger all. They didn't even charge me full price for them and there's a book out called Best We Forget written by an ex-National veteran called Bernard Clancy in Melbourne, well Bernie was there at the same time and in his book he

- 16:00 mentions that he's writing a letter home to his darling and he's say, "You won't believe this but I'm sitting here now eating an Australian meat pie." and he was one of the people that I gave a pie to.

Did you ever sit around thinking about the meal you were going to have when you got home?

Oh God. The biggest hunk of rump steak that you ever saw was going to be and I can't even remember what it was but it was going to be steak and good steak.

- 16:30 I think the American food was largely okay. We eventually did have a sort of snack bar in the Canberra and after the Tet started we had a kitchen set up behind our headquarters there in Saigon so we did continually after that because they always had people on duty all the time and from then on.

Was the US food different to what you would say was Australian food?

Probably not,

- 17:00 except that you would have ice cream at breakfast and that was probably the main difference and they would have a big sign up, "Take all you want but eat all you take." so it wasn't sort of dolled out to as much as you would expect from some of your Australian ones. That was good. The only people we were really jealous of were the air force because I suppose most of them

- 17:30 were either at Nui Dat or Vung Tau, but they could fly in frozen stuff from Malaya. They used to get fresh eggs to and that was really something but the air force have a tendency to live well.

In the position you were in, in Saigon did you see any of the supposed friction that existed between the army and the air force in regard to Iroquois?

No, no and I didn't know of any supposed

- 18:00 friction. There may have been early in the piece because the RAAF pilots would normally have had different operational what would you say instructions to what an American pilot would have. When the Battle of Long Tan was on the RAAF pilots flew out in shit conditions to deliver the bloody ammo to them and that probably made a big difference

- 18:30 and the skill of the Australian pilots was pretty high level but then again were some of the American pilots because I think helicopter pilots have got to be a special breed of person you know.

What about the story about when you are on your clerks course in Pucka being asked for volunteers for Vietnam?

Yeah and I remember the name of the bloke who didn't.

- 19:00 There were 23 of us volunteered and there was one bloke didn't and his name was Erol Lightbody and he came from Elizabeth in South Australia. Elizabeth at that stage was where a lot of the English immigrants lived and Erol had a pretty education accent and he was the only one that didn't and he was the first to go. He really was the first to go. He was

- 19:30 just about to leave, no, he had just left Saigon when I got there. He was lucky. He went to Saigon but he was the first of that whole course to end up there.

From all accounts the stories we hear is that you had to volunteer for Vietnam to go to Vietnam.

Not really. A lot of National Servicemen actually volunteered and I think probably the way it was done I

believe in some infantry

20:00 battalions, anybody that doesn't want to go, you know, stepped forward but who's going to do that? You're in an infantry battalion. You are trained for this and even if you are a National Serviceman who didn't want to go, are you going to step out in front of 550 and other blokes, you and 49 of your mates. Not likely. They may have volunteered but I think they probably volunteered under a bit of duress

20:30 and I don't know of any other course who sort of had volunteers but it might have been a normal thing to ask who wants to volunteer.

But this other bloke that was shanghaied there. He was a regular was he?

No I think he was a National Serviceman and he was gone. It was good because I've never heard of him since then. I feel if he was still in the army I would have run across him somewhere in 20 years.

21:00 He was gone.

What was your impression of the National Servicemen was you were in country?

No different. Some of them bitched about it a bit and you got sick of their bitching sometimes but most of them that I knew took it well and didn't bitch all that much. There were some strange ones I tell you. We had one bloke there that would have come home with practically ever dollar he got paid.

21:30 He never went out on the grog to bars or anything like that. He even bought his own camera with him. He didn't buy one over there. He used to go out on a Sunday when he had a day off and take photographs but never saw him take a drink. Never saw him go into a bar. Good bloke. Nobody really put shit on him after the first couple of weeks.

22:00 'No, no, no I don't believe in that.' "Oh come on." "No, I don't believe in it." Well okay. It was gone then. If you didn't want to do it you didn't want to do it.

Did you find many of the Nashos stayed on after their tour of Vietnam?

A couple. There was one I do remember because when I came home I went to jungle training centre and there was one there. 2791157, Maxwell John Murphy

22:30 and he stayed on. Oh hang on, he didn't go to Vietnam. He stayed on just after his two years and he was a strange case because he was infantry and he went from private to sergeant in infantry and never served in a battalion. I know that he went to a battalion after he made sergeant and I honestly don't remember that he went to Vietnam. It's more than I can tell you now but I can remember his army number.

The rapid promotion of Nashos must have stirred up

23:00 **reg blokes?**

A little bit. When Sam got his two stripes ahead of me. Most of those posted there say into that job that I did in Saigon were posted in to corporals jobs but what they did before you got there they did an internal shuffle. It was just a matter of a piece of paper saying, "Shift Lange from this spot to this spot, to a corporal's job so everybody

23:30 got their two stripes in turn." You know, one or two stripes, and this captain that I had this argument with at the time he was full time duty CMF and I was supposed to send a parcel home to Canberra and I had, but it hadn't arrived and he came into the office one day abusing the hell of out of me in front of everyone and that I had screwed up and this parcel hadn't been sent and all that

24:00 and I said, "I've got it in the book." "It means nothing to me. The parcel should have been there." and he really went off about this and I searched everywhere and I couldn't find it and I was sure it had gone and then about two days later we got a sig in from Canberra saying we've got it. It was misplaced here in Canberra, so I waltzed down to his office and I dropped it on his desk and I said, "What do you say to that, Sir? Now tell me I'm

24:30 bloody lying to you?" and he got a big upset again and we raised voices again and then he quietly said, "You are promoted soon, aren't you Lange?" and I said, "Yes, Sir, I'm next." And he said, "Well, I'll see that you don't get promoted. I'll do my best to make sure you don't get it after I'm gone." And he did and I never...it wasn't until I got home and went to general training centre that I got my first stripe and then my second and then

25:00 I wanted to go back to Vietnam and they kept telling me not yet, not yet and a military police offered me a transfer to MPs and send me back to Saigon as a sergeant, so service corps said, "You withdraw that application and we'll send you back." so I did and then they posted me to Victoria and I really cracked up. It was too late to put it back in. I decided I may as well get married and July '71

25:30 I got married and promoted to sergeant and I was happy with the promotion and still pissed off about Vietnam. I got back from my honeymoon and the chief clerk gave me a posting order for Saigon again so I had two weeks back at Canungra and all the instructors remembered me because I had been there

for two years. I copped shit from them and I'm going through the confidence course and there's one where you swing out across the mud pool and I timed my run

26:00 perfectly to catch the rope as it swung back and a bloke whose nickname was Sludge. He was an infantry sergeant he was sitting up top and picked up the rope like that and I went straight up and down into the mud and they you climb a 30 or 40ft tower and jump into the Cooma River and that because you had the bear pit and all that sort of thing and no matter how good you were you couldn't jump across, you had to climb a little wall and go into the pit and there were stories like,

26:30 "We put dead sheep and things in there." It was just mud and water and I said to the bloke on the tower, "I don't like jumping off high places. If I don't go on the third time you'd better push me." "Okay sarg." So I marched out the thing and next thing bump. The bugger had pushed me on the first time and I said after that, "Why did you do that?" "Sarg [sergeant], anyone who says push them on the third time isn't going to get it on the first so we get it over with."

27:00 And but the day I finished that course was the day Billy McMahon said we're not going to send any more troops. I wanted to go back.

Why did you want to go back?

Well I was going to marry this girl regardless and then after being married I thought, "This will set us up. She can go home and work in the hospital where she was before, I'm going to Saigon. I'll live on my Saigon allowance. I'll stay a virgin for this year

27:30 and we'll bank all my army pay." It would have set us up for life and I also had the feeling all the time that I wanted to go back. I don't know why. I wasn't comfortable here. Canungra was good you know because training for Vietnam all the time and I wasn't involved in the training but it was like going back you know.

28:00 I don't know why but I feel that I had to go back.

Have you ever regretted not going back?

Yeah. If I could have had a shot at McMahon that day I would have shot him. He screwed things up. I started my married life with a \$3,000 belonging to my brother who I'd guaranteed into a car. If I'd gone back over there that would never have happened. If I had I would have been able to pay for it.

28:30 **Did you ever feel that life in Australia after being in Vietnam just never had, gave you the same sort of buzz that you got from being there?**

A lot yeah. I never thought about it that way at the time but there were certain times that I did. I was a clerical instructor in the IRRRC [Industrial Relations Research Centre] Centre for two years

29:00 and I got to be pretty good, and that's not false modesty, and I knew I was good and my results showed it and I had to qualify out an advanced clerical course as part of my promotion for sergeant and I was also an instructor on that course for the lessons I taught they gave the pass average and I got a

29:30 really top result and then I went and did the drill and weapons course for promotion to sergeant and here I am a temporary sergeant getting the promotion subject to sergeant. I thought towards the end of the course I had stuffed up and upset the staff because my lessons seemed to be harder than the other blokes, but I shut my mouth and did it and time to march out I marched into the RSM's [Regimental Sergeant Major] office and he said, "Well sergeant." he said

30:00 "Pretty average result, but you have qualified subject now for warrant rank." and I said, "Bloody beauty, Sir." "What do you mean?" and I said, "I only came down here to get ready for sergeant but I'll take them both." and he said, "You can't do that." And I said, "You told me I've got it." "I can't do it. March out and come back in last." so instead of getting an average mediocre report I got a glowing report. The RSM back at Puckapunyal found my report on his desk. I was

30:30 down the other end of the building and he called at me, "To get my arse back down to his office." and he said, this other sergeant said, "You've screwed up. That will keep me off the duty list for a week." and the RSM didn't even lower his voice, "This is the best bloody result anyone from this unit has ever got from those grunts down there." That was a high and then he asked me to do him a favour and if the RSM asks you do him a favour, "Yes, yes." "Will you instruct that year on that course for sergeant A."

31:00 And I got to instruct that year, sergeant A for corporal course and I was the only sergeant on it. Everyone else was a warrant officer. That put a few warrant officer noses out of joint but it was that good and I enjoyed that. '76-'77 I was with the Aviation Regiment and we had survey operation on Irian Jaya and we were sending pilots and ground crew

31:30 and all that sort of stuff over there and I had to get all their passports and stuff. Multi-entry visas because the Indons [Indonesians] were a bit funny about this and couldn't work out how to do it. Couldn't find anyone to help me so I rang the Indonesian Embassy and Canberra and a lady answered the phone and she gave me the name and address and she said, "Address them to me." and she told me her name and I thought, "Oh shit, the cleaning lady." And I did everything she said

- 32:00 and I spent a bit of money at Foreign Affairs at Brisbane so I could get official passports issued in three days. They normally take three weeks. I took this fellow to a strip show for lunch and filled him full of beer and the best I ever did was the passport and multi-entry visas issued in 48 hours but the instruction sort of didn't tell you how to do it so I sort of did it my own way and when the passports
- 32:30 came back from the embassy, this first woman had signed them. She was the First Secretary to the Ambassador so then I got a phone call from the Div [Division] Headquarters saying, "We'll have an instruction out on how to go about getting the passports and visas." "She'll be right, I've got them." "What? You can't do that. All my blokes are ready to go." And they were screwing it up. They were going through a Consulate and they were getting them stuffed up and I went to the boss and got them fixed up
- 33:00 and that was good. You feel good. The army office, I was there three years and eight months. I filled two captain's jobs two months at a time and I did that well but I couldn't get paid higher duties because a warrant officer making more money than a captain on promotion anyhow but that was good. You know and then I was doing overseas allowances and I got a trip to the
- 33:30 Solomon Islands out of that to look at a bunch of engineers to see what they were living in after I had done their allowances. I briefed Clooneys Ross when he went off to England as the military attaché you know and he sat there for an hour and 10 minutes and never made a sound and I thought, "I'm talking to myself here." and at the end of 1 hour and 10 minutes I said, "Well, Sir, do you have any questions?" and he said, "Three." And he asked me three bloody
- 34:00 questions. He heard everything I said and that was good. I thought, a major general telling him what he could and couldn't do and what we would do for him and I came back to Brisbane and I did two and a half years with army welfare. A woman went a bit crazy. She had a loaded rifle and I got called to her house and it took me two and a half hours to get the gun off her but apart from that I buried about 20 soldiers, two wives and two babies.
- 34:30 Although each one was depressing you are on a bit of a high when you've finished it because you can see what you've done, how much you've helped these people out and I used to tell my trainees there's no glamour in being a clerk, but see if you are a clerk and you go home at the end of the day and all you've done is solved the problems of one soldier, then you have earned your money because you have taken the problem away and you have made him effective again
- 35:00 and that's what being a clerk is about and I believe that so strongly and for five years I told everybody on the course that. You know I run into some of these people. Some of them have been promoted. In 1990, I was at an army reserve pay corps camp at Wacol and there was six warrant officer class one all pay corps, and some of them had been trained by me and they all got promoted one level above me,
- 35:30 that was good to see. They must have learned something. There were a lot of high points and I loved the army, and if my kids hadn't have been starting high school, on the move back to Canberra again. But it was time to let them settle so I got out and but there was some very depressing points you know
- 36:00 and very dull times but there were those high times that compensated.

Can you recall that JTC [Joint Targeting Course], the guys that were playing enemy?

The demo company. They were first called One Division Headquarters Defence Company and then they were called Independent Rifle Company from memory.

It's just that I've heard stories that they were a bunch of ratbags. Can you remember?

Some of them were.

- 36:30 When I first got promoted to lance corporal and my first duty corporals job they were the picket and I'd seen what the other corporals did when I was on switch duty at night and they'd walk in, "You the picket?" "Yeah." "Been on before?" "Yeah." "Know what to do then?" "Yeah." "Right go down the picket room and I'll come down and see you." The instructions were you were to read them the orders. Their own corporal had to do that before they came over and then I had to do it again and neither of us did it because they had
- 37:00 all been on before and they had had the orders read to them before and we found one of the pickets drunk or the duty officer found him drunk, I don't know, midnight, 1.00, staggering up the road from the back of the officers mess with a jug of beer in each hand using the whole width of the road and not spilling a drop. So I got charged for failing to read the orders and I fronted up to a lieutenant armoured corps and I got fined \$10. The CSM was 12246 Colin
- 37:30 Farmer and he's dead now, but we marched out and Colin said, "Guilty as charged, \$10 fine." He said, "Don't worry about it. It will never happen." And I said, "Why?" "He's only a bloody lieutenant. He won't fine you, you're a NCO [Non Commissioned Officer]." so I came back from legal branch and of course the commandant heard about it and I got personally interviewed by the commandant and he's reading
- 38:00 the riot act to me and how easy he could make me a lance corporal and how easy it would be to make me a private and he said, "In fact, I think I bloody well. I know your face. You've been up in front of me before." "Not like this, Sir. You might remember my face from Saigon when you were the chief of staff

and I used to bring your priority and immediate signals up there." "That's right, you, that bastard from registry." And I said, "Yeah. Do you remember such-and-such a night when you came down from the roof and you came

- 38:30 down and got Major Keper to go up because some of the rounds go up over the roof were too close." "I remember that. Sit down." Twenty minutes, half an hour and he's tell me about how Colonel Bradbury replaced him and Griffs came home and Bradbury had moved into a room down the hallway and he had spent the weekend over. "You know if Bradbury had moved into my room, that bugger would be bloody dead because three days after I came home a rocket hit the room in the middle
- 39:00 of the night." So we were talking and it was good and he said, "So how'd this happen?" So I told him the story. "All right. You learn anything?" "Too bloody right." "All right, get out of here and send that dickhead up here to see me." So that was it.

What about back in Vietnam what was the story about Colonel Griff during Tet?

Yes. He was up on the roof

- 39:30 prowling around looking at all the pretty lights I suppose and there were shots that came terrible close so Major Keper went up and didn't tell any of the picket up there and he's walking around and next thing a hand held flare and everybody shit. Griff wasn't real happy about him doing that but Colonel Griff I was told and I believe it's true led an Australian patrol
- 40:00 of about eight or 10 people down through an unsafe area on the edge of Shalon looking for some Australian civilians who were supposed to be down there and this is a full colonel. He doesn't have to do that. Send a major, should send a captain, but he did it himself.

We'll stop there.

Tape 10

- 00:30 **I was wondering if you can tell us about the Aussie warrant officers being delivered to the Five Oceans Hotel?**

That was strange. Actually we were picking them up in the morning and the bus driver was a Pommy [English] and we had our bus with the big Australia sign on the front and we came around the corner just up from the Five O's and there's American security. Most of them were army but with SP [Security Police] on their little

- 01:00 helmets and most of them are black and this bloke's waving us away because people are shooting at him and we stop and Dave said, "Well what do you reckon?" and I said, "Oh well, we can't be hurt. We're Australians. We've got to go to work, they've got to go to work." So he said, "All right hang on." So we went flying down the road to the hotel. The shooting stopped and I jumped out and stood at the front of the bus while the warrant officers got into the bus and I got
- 01:30 back in and the shooting started again. They stopped shooting while we went and got those people out of there. Bloody unreal, but that Australia map on the front. It must have meant something to them. It was good to be behind it.

Does that surprise you?

Yeah, particularly with the VC you wouldn't know where they were from. If they lived in Saigon

- 02:00 and they probably did they would have been exposed to Australians before and probably formed their own opinion and as I said before they disliked us less than they disliked the Americans and that's the only reason I can think of that they stopped shooting while we drove down there and I was heading down to the American PX [American canteen unit] one day and there was a crack and a bullet went past me and hit the security guard there and I assume that they were shooting at him
- 02:30 and not me but he was a good shot because it went bloody close to me. But it hit the black American there. So they had a bit of a thing about them and I suppose maybe it was they were black with the Vietnamese as well. Maybe they didn't treat them real well so I don't know.

Did you buy a camera from PX?

- 03:00 Yeah I bought an old Oshika JC [camera]. I got some good photos and I've been looking for them but I sent the films home to Australia to be developed and Kodak wouldn't develop them because it was objectionable material. They were mainly dead bodies and things. If I'd sent them to Hawaii they would have done them because that's where the Americans were but
- 03:30 I've got some photos of helicopters with a 50 calibre machine gun mounted on each side. Twin 30s. Twin 60s. I've got photos taken from above a Huey Cobra [helicopter] in the air when I used to fly around with these Yanks and I've got one of a church out in the middle of the rice paddies. Totally

isolated here's this beautiful big church.

04:00 **The photos that Kodak decided they weren't going to process did you ever get those negs [negatives] back?**

No. No, they never came back. No.

And did you mostly shoot slide?

Yes. I've had a couple of black and white photos but over the years they've been knocked about a bit and I threw them out.

A lot of Vietnam veterans we spoke to shot slides. What was the reason behind that?

They were the in thing at the time and if I can find them they are a box

04:30 about that square of them and about that high. But they're probably down the back shed somewhere. I don't know if they are but if find them I'll let you know. There are some interesting shots in there. Initially I did have a black and white camera and that's what I took a lot of photos with during the Tet Offensive and as I say over the years lost, thrown out whatever.

What about,

05:00 **did you manage to bring any souvenirs home?**

Not really. I didn't worry about it. I bought a stack of silk from people for my family and my mother was going to make something out of the big piece I gave her and before she died she gave it back to me so we've still got that here somewhere. I bought home the chess set. That was beautifully done. It was all hand carved

05:30 and the rooks are about that high and the queen and the king are about that high. It's beautifully done and the box the draws go in and the top is engraved and etched with dragons. I can't really think of anything else I brought home.

When you first got home to Brisbane when you came home from Vietnam was there anyone to greet you?

Yeah, Mum and Dad

06:00 and my sister and my mate and that's how I ended up in the gutter at George Street. They met me at the airport and we were walking down outside where McDonald & East used to be and that's when the parcel came out of the ute and I dived in the gutter.

What was it like to actually have people there waiting for you?

It was great. Tears everywhere. Gallons of them. It was good and then I got back to

06:30 Crows Nest and it was so bloody quiet. I can't believe it's so quiet. Just no noise at night. A difference.

And did you get your rump?

I can't remember what the first meal was but I wouldn't be surprise thinking back if it was that because I certainly let them know.

In the years following when you are

07:00 **in the army and you said you wanted to go back to Vietnam and you just missed out on that. Were there times where you wished that the Australian Army was involved in a conflict somewhere. Was army life ever boring?**

Sometimes it was boring but I never wished for us to be involved in something else. While we were there I wanted to go back I suppose partly because I was a soldier and that's where should be

07:30 and National Service was still in and not that I wanted to save a National Serviceman's life but it was better for me to be back there than someone else. But I don't know what it was. It was just in the mind that I wanted to go and when the marriage bit came up I really wanted to go for financial reasons as much as anything else.

08:00 It didn't happen.

What about, how did you feel when you saw Saigon falling?

A bit sad actually. You know because we'd put in so much and it cost so much life-wise - 500, like and it seemed

08:30 to be wasted and looking back over the years I really believe it was political interference that stopped a different result and they keep saying it was the first televised war and they let people with cameras get they should never have been and that's what it comes down to. I don't know how many deaths they would have caused doing that. They definitely didn't save any. There are people

- 09:00 that say, "Yes they did because they pulled people out." but the governments made big mistakes. American commanders made some massive mistakes at all levels. People on the ground that called in napalm on villages instead of, you see the ad again on TV with that girl burnt and
- 09:30 mistakes like that you see, and I would say that Australians probably killed a few that shouldn't have been killed but that was more a mistake and stupidity rather than not care and going in and wiping out an area. Also killed a few water buffalo to they did when they were
- 10:00 rushing around the scrub at night.

Did people ever come up and give you personal insults when you returned from Vietnam?

Not at such. At Canungra it never worried me because I lived on the base and most weekends I went home. The Canungra people themselves were good. The Crows Nest people themselves were good. I never wore a uniform

- 10:30 when I went out so nobody knew where I was from. The people in Seymour didn't like us because we were army but they were happy to have the money you spent and I very rarely went out of uniform down there and for a lot of the time. I think I lived in Melbourne for six months and the rest of the time I lived in a married quarter in Seymour for
- 11:00 about two months and then I got a married quarter on the base so I never went out uniform there. The only real problem I had was when I came back to Queensland to Enoggera and I went to join the RSL and the old World War II bloke who was handling the paperwork would allow me to join the Services Club but he said, "We're not going to let you join the sub branch of the RSL." "But I'm a returned serviceman." "No,
- 11:30 you're not. You've only been to Vietnam. We don't want your type." And that was from the RSL and now they need us because there is not enough of them left, and that was an attitude and there were a few of us who would go to work in uniform but you wouldn't put your medal ribbons on until you got to work. It was just easier that way
- 12:00 because you felt on the defensive all the time because of what some people were saying and you really didn't know how people were going to react. Once you were through the gate and you put your ribbons on you were treated properly by soldiers who hadn't been there but to have a bloke in the RSL was totally devastating really but I joined the RSL sub branch
- 12:30 in Crows Nest and they didn't mind. Yeah.

Was that the hardest impact to get from all the people you might have expected it from?

Yeah they were the ones you'd expect to support you. We got heckled a bit one year when we marched on Anzac Day in Melbourne as a unit. We marched up to the war memorial and there were people yelling from the sidelines. You heard it but you ignored it.

- 13:00 It was either '71 or '72. But there was, you know sometimes you might get an occasional remark in a pub or something like that if the subject was brought up.

What about the common thing that was brought up was the 'no welcome home' parade thing. How did that affect you?

Yeah.

- 13:30 For a long time you didn't think much about it but there should have been something and there wasn't so there was something missing, and even when we did, I didn't go to Sydney. I went to the one in Brisbane and the one in Canberra, and the one in Canberra was great. There were people there in '92 that I hadn't seen since '68. A couple of them
- 14:00 I hadn't seen since recruit training so and that was good but for a lot of people it was just too late. There were so many dead already since they came home and that's the hard part and having been on the edge of suicide myself you know you can understand it and a couple of weeks ago I found out that a bloke I used to work with in Pucka shot himself about two years ago now.
- 14:30 It's just for some reason got to be too much.

And what about Anzac Day post Vietnam?

I never marched on Anzac Day for a long time except for the one time in Victoria when we marched as a unit. Never went. Just it didn't seem worth it a lot of the time and it wasn't until

- 15:00 I suppose after that first welcome home parade that we really started to march in Brisbane as a group of just Vietnam veterans. There were people in Battalion Associations who marched in groups and they were sort of Malaya onwards, Korea onwards. When the battalion system started the 9
- 15:30 Battalion. We started off with three but so they marched as association groups and I don't know what sort of response they got but it was only after that first welcome home parade that we marched as a

group of Vietnam veterans and really got a good cheer out of it and you almost cried. Going down a main street and people actually cheering and when we did the welcome home march up here.

- 16:00 '92 was Canberra and before that was Brisbane and before that was Sydney I think. I can't remember the years anymore but it wasn't until after that first one that I began to march on Anzac Day.

And what about today on Anzac Day. What are your thoughts on that?

I usually march and I usually go in for Vietnam Veteran's Day and you feel good

- 16:30 because the response now is good. It's not like you are a leper or a bloody outcast. That's all right now. And if I don't want to go down here I can always go to Crows Nest and there are only about 40 or 50 that march there. Most of them are Second World War people. One year I marched up there and a bloke, Black Dog Rulings turned up and he was my

- 17:00 RCM at Kelvin Grove and there used to be a cartoon on TV of a dog called Muttly, used to laugh funny. Well that's the way Black Dog laughed, but his son was an officer with the electronic warfare unit at Kabala so they were marching and Black Dog came up to march with him. It was good to see him again. He wasn't a terribly likeable bloke

- 17:30 but he was a warrant officer class 1 and he'd been a RCM and his personality was such that he had earned every bit of it because he'd never have been given a sympathy mark and for that you've got to respect the man. He was all right.

How have you seen the attitude of World War II blokes towards Vietnam veterans change?

From 1973 to now it's done a complete about face.

- 18:00 In the big cities now from that one incident at the RSL, it's good now. It's totally different and you are fully accepted. I think it probably took them a while to get around the idea because a lot of them didn't agree with us being there either, and they made the same mistake the protesters did and took it out on the soldiers rather than the government. I don't have a great deal of time

- 18:30 for the RSL now. I think it's a bit too politicised.

How do you see the way the young men and women that serve in the Australian Army that are going overseas are being treated now?

I think on return by the army not as good as they should be. I was talking to a guy who went to Timor and they came home and they were all sitting in a shed or a room or some bloody thing and the

- 19:00 psychology officer, the psych officer came in dressed in his golf clothes. "Well, all safely home. Good to see...Any problems?" And he was looking at his watch all the time. Nobody spoke. "Okay. See you later." So that sort of thing doesn't help and there are people now who are TPI

- 19:30 from Timor. I've got a few concerns for my brother's stepdaughter. She did two tours in Timor you know and she was the first group that went in. She was 26 Transport Squadron. It was funny she joined the army. She went to Kapooka. She was in A Company, the same as I was. Her first unit was 26 Transport Squadron, mine was 26 Company,

- 20:00 but they call them squadrons now. So much similar. Pretty well her first posting was overseas so they went into Timor. She's out now. She's got herself a job outside but I think after anything like that there is a bit of an emotional let down.

What about say the Australian public treats an Australian service person?

I think that's a lot better now. They've

- 20:30 come to accept them for what they are and for their professionalism. They are better soldiers now than we were and you know you have a few drug problems like that stuff in Darwin lately but soldiers are people, Cops are people so there are good and bad in both but I think the soldiers now are much more professional. Better trained, better equipped. More disciplined than we were.

- 21:00 **The terrible time the Vietnam vets went through do you think anything positive has come as a result of that?**

I think it had because its made people and possibly government more aware of the fact that there are problems like PTSD. That there are problems with equipment used and materials used that you need to be more aware of. Its made a lot of changes.

- 21:30 **So how do you sum up when you look back on your Vietnam experience? How do you sum it up?**

If I go through the army time I enjoyed 90 percent of it I suppose and if I was young enough I'd do it again. If I could still be in there I would be. It was my life and it took precedence unfortunately most of the time over my family. I was soldier before I got married and I told my wife

22:00 that, and I will always be a soldier first, and it still feels good sometimes when you meet some of the people you have served with and you think back over some of the good things and the fact that on my report at Kapooka they said, "No NCO potential." and I got out of the army as a warrant officer and I made sergeant in four years, nearly five, four and a half years;

22:30 11 years to make warrant officer and I had no NCO potential.

Was there any question when your six year contract came up?

No. Not at all. There was never a question. I was a 20-year man from day one and if my kids hadn't been going to high school I'd still be there.

A lot of the blokes we have spoken to when you are in the army,

23:00 **you've got to give yourself either to the army or to your family. There's no middle ground. What are your thoughts on that?**

Pretty much. A lot would depend on the job you are in. If you are in a non-field headquarters type job you know, yeah, its totally different but if you are in the field like an infantry battalion, an engineer regiment, you've got to be prepared to give the army what they want

23:30 and engineers in my experience have always been more prepared than most others to give the army what they need. When I was with Army Community Services, Army Welfare, every time there was an exercise on you'd know what units were going and you'd know what files to pull and in the two and a half years that I was there we had bugger-all problems with engineers unless there was a sickness or a death. Artillery would go away

24:00 and next thing some wife would be on the phone, "I want my husband back." Infantry - the same. The engineers would go first. They would go to Shoalwater Bay or Tin Can Bay or Quiet Water Bay to get the area ready and then they'd stay there and either act as enemy or fight each other while the exercise was on and when the exercise was over they'd clear it all up again and then they'd come home again and the engineers wives have to get to be

24:30 a special breed of women they really do because they were so good. I don't know what they are like now but then they were just that good. You know I had a lot of respect for infantry, engineers things like that. The arms corps, because they had to give everything.

How did your poems come about?

I don't know really. I think what

25:00 started it a cousin of mine was in three battalion on their second tour and I was in a Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service one day complaining about something and there was a poem on the noticeboard. That's my cousin that wrote that and I got in touch and I've got a copy of all of them and, "Maybe I can do that."

25:30 and only on rare occasions have I been able to sit down with the idea of writing a poem. Usually they come to me as a sort of a rough idea and then firm into something solid and over a day or so I probably write it. The one I wrote about the girl in Rockhampton, The Night She Said Goodbye, came to me in five minutes. We were sitting in the trauma course

26:00 with the psychiatrist and we were talking about pre-Vietnam experiences and the personal problems it had caused us and one bloke said, "My girlfriend dumped me." and, "Mine did too." I suppose she was a girlfriend. I was pretty serious about her. More than any of the others and in five minutes I wrote that. One of

26:30 them came to me in a dream. It's I was walking through a garden and I came up to a gate and there was a dead bloke there gardening and he told me, "Not going through yet. It's a one way gate." and that was the dream and I wrote a sort of follow up to that and just recently I wrote one about tunnel rats because I realised there was never one

27:00 there about them and the engineer tunnel rats were the ones that went down a tunnel with a torch and a handgun. You know I don't know of any of them that got a medal for that. I certainly wouldn't have done that.

Okay I'm going to get you to read a few if that's okay.

I call this one A Big Adventure.

\n[Verse follows]\n 'It was all a big adventure\n When I went away to war.\n

27:30 It couldn't be too bad\n

Our fathers went before.\n We had the battle training\n Up in Shoalwater Bay\n And a jungle training centre\n We learnt the proper way.\n I remember as I left the plane\n The boiling heat and steam\n And in the wet each afternoon\n The monsoon rains would team.\n But we believed that when we did\n As our government decreed\n We'd be all right as after all\n We were there to meet a need.\n Excitement

turned to boredom\n As the days went slowly by\n

28:00 And frustration replaced fervour\n

As the fire died inside.\n We really tried to do our best\n As we'd been taught to do\n But the people in Australia had a different point of view.\n They stopped our mail, delayed our stores and helped the Viet Cong\n And when we finally came back home\n They told us we'd done wrong.\n They called us, "baby killers." said we should not have gone\n But when you wear the jungle green to the government you belong.\n Years and years ...

28:30 ... we lived like this and tried to carry on\n

As if it didn't matter that what they said was wrong.\n No victory march all we seemed to get was hate\n And when we got our welcome home for some it was too late.\n 'He Died in Vietnam'\n I looked at the body lying on there\n The suntanned face, the short blonde hair.\n 10 minutes ago he was feeling fine\n And nine minutes ago he stood on a mine.\n

29:00 He was a fine example of an Australian man\n

So what was he doing in Vietnam?\n He was doing his duty and signed on the line\n And just happened to be there on this day and time.\n He'll go home now to his friends and kin\n And they'll join us in mourning for him.\n There's to be no heroes welcome for this young man\n Because he died in Vietnam.\n How much must we pay for doing our job?\n Why did we come home and face a mob?\n There will be no heroes welcome for you young man\n

29:30 Because you served in Vietnam.\n

That's a true story about a pub in Toowoomba called When Were You There?

\n[Verse follows]\n 'I was standing in a pub one day\n Just keeping to myself.\n Using all my concentration on the bottles on the shelf.\n I ignored the blokes around me\n Didn't look their way.\n I made out I didn't hear them\n Or what they had to say.\n I slowly came to notice\n

30:00 the drinker on my left\n

but what had really caught me eye\n was a badge upon his chest.\n A return from active service badge\n Was there for all to see.\n His age would have to be\n About the same as me.\n Our eyes met and he nodded\n As he saw the badge I war\n It's a long way from south east Asia\n And a dirty deadly war.\n We had both been home for many years\n But his face still showed the pain.\n Who were you with? He softly asked\n And looked away again.\n

30:30 Headquarters AFV [Australian Force Vietnam] I said and took another drink.\n

What about you? I asked him\n And he seemed to stop and think.\n Here was the answer that he gave\n It was all he had to say\n When diggers get together we communicate that way\n You are doing okay?\n He asked me then\n Do you usually feel all right?\n I'd been going fair enough I said\n If I could only sleep at night\n He nodded understanding\n He felt the same himself\n

31:00 And we returned our full attention\n

To the bottles on the shelf\n When were you there? I asked him next\n As he bought us both a beer\n He didn't give an answer\n And I wondered did he hear\n I turned my head to face him\n And I said Are you all right?\n He slowly shook his head\n And said Mate I was there last bloody night.\n

And that's a true story.

\n[Verse follows]\n 'We are lying in ambush here tonight\n

31:30 And we moved in carefully at last light\n

The moon is up and full with light\n The killing grounds clear in machine gun sights\n We are only five metres away from the track\n And my mind wonders off so I drag it back\n Because Charlie comes south with a heavy pack\n And we'll make sure that he doesn't go back\n I can hear a faint whisper of movement\n And I tighten my grip on the gun\n We will spring this with bullets and claymore\n And Charlie's got nowhere to run\n

32:00 There's a massive bang and a flash of light\n

As the claymore clears the path\n It's too late now for Charlie to fight\n Because tonight he breathes his last\n The noise and the shooting now dies down\n And we watch them for signs of life\n There's four of them out there on the ground\n And they lost their lives tonight.\n

This is about a girl I knew before I went away. It's called The Night She Said Goodbye

\n[Verse follows]\n 'I think the army has changed you\n She said to you that night\n

32:30 And now you're going to Vietnam\n

And I don't think that's right\n I know that we've been happy\n And we both hope for more\n But I feel

that I can't love you\n If you're going off to war\n The words she said destroyed me\n I didn't think she could\n I had to do my duty as any soldier would\n I haven't seen her since that night\n I wouldn't know her anymore\n And I don't think I'd want to\n She was right\n It was not my war.\n

33:00 This is about an aboriginal mate of mine called Dave Alley. I served with him in Saigon in 1968. It's called, The Colour of Our Skin

\n[Verse follows]\n Dave was just another bloke\n who went away to war\n And we'd been mates for I guess\n for 30 years or more\n And there have been some times I think\n That we have been closer mates than kin\n What started off this friendship\n Was the colour of our skin\n By the colour of skin I mean\n we both wore jungle green\n And more awesome ... \n

33:30 ...fearsome diggers\n

you never would have seen\n I think we almost looked the same\n When dressed in jungle green\n With rifles boots and helmets\n We would carefully check the scene\n After all these years we're still good mates\n Our friendship seemed still right\n And it's never been a problem\n That Dave is black and I am white.\n

And this blokes still alive but he's got a brain tumour. It's called, Bluey's Turn

34:00 Is Dead

\n[Verse follows]\n Bluey's turn is dead\n Phil said as he slumped down on the bed\n He was on his second trip he said\n And now the bugger's dead\n We'll have to pack his gear up\n And leave it on his bed\n But we better off than Bluey\n Because poor old Bluey's dead\n With heavy hearts we sorted through old Bluey Turner's gear\n For he might have had some stuff\n We knew that would cause his family tears\n We packed the clothes to send back home\n And the stuff the Q would need\n

34:30 And we found stuff in the stuff he owned\n

For which we had a need\n There was things there in his kit\n That no one else would need\n We might as well hang on to these said Phil\n And I agreed\n Then came a shadow on the floor\n And a voice boomed loud and clear\n From Bluey Turner at the door\n What are you blokes doing here?\n I knew my face was turning red\n And my hair had stood on end\n And slowly Phil stood up and said\n We were told that you were dead\n We'll I'm bloody not said Blue to us\n

35:00 I'm here and large as life\n

I just got off the flaming bus\n You blokes are worse than having a wife\n We still see Blue from time to time\n And laugh about that day\n Cause Bluey Turner's large as life\n We don't want it any other way.\n This is about a bloke I spoke with one night who said How Do I Tell the Kids?\n 'How do I tell the kids? He sighed\n So that they'll understand\n That I'm haunted by the ones who died\n

35:30 In a Southeast Asian land\n

They come to me in my sleep\n With staring eyes so dead\n Perhaps that's why I wake in fright\n Blood pounding in my head\n I've never told them all the tales\n Of days and nights of terror\n Of screams and moans from wounded men\n That stay with me forever\n I don't know if they all realise\n That it's hard to show emotion\n Or the love that hides behind my eyes\n And surges like the ocean\n

36:00 I'm trying hard to make a change\n

In outlook and reaction\n Often I feel really strange\n And can't control my actions\n There's a sickness deep inside me\n That I'm trying hard to beat\n I want to be the man I should be\n And stand on steady feet.\n

This is about engineers who went largely unheralded. It's called The Tunnel Rat

\n[Verse follows]\n 'He's a hero in a green cloth matt\n

36:30 This man we call the tunnel rat\n

There's a lot of soldiers that would be here\n If it wasn't for this engineer\n With torch and pistol into tunnels he goes\n Facing dangers that nobody knows\n Around his ankles he wears a rope\n But if it all goes wrong\n He's got no hope\n He'll crawl through the dark\n And listen and wait\n Looking for Charlie\n Who is filled with hate\n He conquers his fear of traps and snakes\n He knows his important are the risks that he takes\n They didn't seem to get a reward\n

37:00 I don't know of any with a bravery award\n

But there's a lot owe more than a vote of thanks\n To the tunnel rats among their ranks.\n

And it was a big adventure.

Yeah I think you did that one.

I did that one didn't I?

That was the start wasn't it? All poems copyright Robert Lange.

Yeah that's right. Use them if you want to.

That's it. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS