

Australians at War Film Archive

James Vandam (Jack) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 2nd February 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1565>

Tape 1

00:41 **Jack, thanks so much for your time. Can I start by asking you can you give me a brief overview of your life? Where you were born to where you are now?**

I was born in Hilversum in Holland in 1934 in October and not long after my birth my family moved to

01:00 Nijmegen, which was seat of the Vandam family. My father had just returned before my birth from Indonesia where he had a business and they carried on the family tradition of being butchers. I went to a Catholic school, private school, and ultimately I tried to become a civil engineer. That never eventuated. The war stopped a lot a that.

01:30 1939, '40 when the war started our town got hit pretty bad. February 1944 the town got bombed by accident by Americans. I saw the bombs come outta the planes actually. What happened was at midday the sirens had gone like to clear the town, that everything was clear and I wasn't all that far from home and we were in a church.

02:00 There was some thing that was on and I went home for lunch and not far from home I looked up. I could hear a small group of planes, oh about a dozen or so coming over. We were lived right on the German border. Nijmegen is right on the split and looked up, see what the planes were and I saw little specks come out of it and I don't know what made me do it but I took off like a startled gazelle and just as I came home the whole town got flattened. I think that the casualty rate

02:30 was close to ten thousand people. We didn't get bombed as such. We lived right on the outskirt at time. My father was in the town itself because we had two butcher shops, one in the town and one where we lived, and well we didn't really know what happened 'til we saw like people coming past the place. You know like bandaged up. You know like confusion reigned supreme and

03:00 I found out later that I lost a cousin and you know like in hindsight if you talk about luck, there was a hell of a lot of luck involved because we lived right near an a very old church, which is a landmark in the town, and one of the hands of the clock tower went straight through the cot of my cousin and that was the casualty but being lunch time, the whole family and

03:30 people that were working there were all around the dinner table above the shop and the bomb went straight, one of the bombs went straight through the table and exploded. They actually saw the damn thing coming through. You know like I know I'm smiling about this but you know like at the time it wasn't very funny but if you really look at it in hindsight it's just one a those things that how things can happen and it's like that when you grow up in a war time situation. I remember going to my grandmother's place

04:00 and there was a aerial fight going on and for some reason I got out a the tram I was on and the tram got hit by a plane got shot down just around the corner. What made me get off the train, ah off the tram don't ask me but you get close calls and I would a been what? I was born in '34. That would a been between '40 and '45 so six, seven. So I've grown up with a fair bit of you know like that type a stuff.

Sorry, can I just interrupt

04:30 **there.**

Mm.

Just watch your foot tapping. It gets picked up on the mic [microphone].

Mm.

So try and just...

Oh right, okay.

Try and relax.

No, you're right.

Sorry, continue on.

And what happened then was you know like the war came to an end. I remember getting on top of the roof. We lived on the higher part of the town and Holland being pretty flat you know that was quite an achievement but we lived in this three, four storey house like above the shop

- 05:00 and oh there was a lot of air activity and all of that. We were right on the road between England and Germany. We could see the towns burning in Germany virtually every night and stuff like that and you just grew used to it but on this particular occasion we were on the top of the roof having a look and I saw the Arnhem landings. I saw the parachutes coming out of the planes and we thought something was gonna get you know like being done about then a plane came over pretty low and I don't know whether it was a German plane or a British plane. They were that low I could have virtually shaken hands with the pilot and he was droppin'
- 05:30 a few odds and ends around the place. So we got back off the roof and it wasn't long after there we saw the first Americans. They were the 82nd Airborne, who had landed near the town, and they fought around the town for a long time on and off and we were a stepping stone from the operations from Holland into Germany and stuff like that but we had to get out of the shop we were in. We lived pretty close
- 06:00 to the Nijmegen Bridge and the family decided to go to my father's sister's butcher shop, which was on the other side a the town, and we made our way to that under intense fire because there was a war goin' on. We were bein' shot at and stuff like that. I remember it vividly as anything. We were pretty scared but we were pretty young and that was close to a hospital and a bridge and during the ongoing months
- 06:30 the bridge always became a target for the odd German that wanted to knock that bridge out and I remember sitting in front of a great big glass window over the shop when one a the bombs went off and when I came out a that just as well I was wearing an overcoat, it was just looked like a guinea pig with all the glass shards stickin' out a the back a my coat. The house was used by the Brits, Canadians, Americans as a
- 07:00 billet for a long time because we had a smallgoods factory underneath the shop where plenty a room there and I'll come back to that hospital later on because when I was in the army in Australia I was talkin' to the brigadier when I was gonna go up for commission. He remembered the shop. He remembered the hospital. He remembered just about everything what was there
- 07:30 and that's the sort of atmosphere that I grew up in. The family had a bit of a feud when the war came to its end. My father, being on the bottom of the pecking order was more or less told to pack his bags and the family took over his shop, being a family concern in Holland as the oldest, the second and the third. So my father decided to emigrate and we had our name down for Canada, America, the
- 08:00 Dutch East Indies, South Africa and Australia. I remember it well and Australia came first and away we went. We came here in 1952 on the Subayak, [Sibayak?] that was the name of the plane. It was supposed to be the last trip but the trip before was the last trip and I think it had two more trips since. Quite a trip and we landed in Australia and we moved into Bathurst and we were there
- 08:30 only for about a week or so. My father knew somebody who knew somebody. We moved into Woy Woy and I remember I lift, lifted all the way. I hitchhiked. I read somewhere that that was the way to travel in Australia and I was gonna have a go at it and I beat my family to Woy Woy, who went by train and all that, I think by about three or four hours and we lived in Woy Woy for quite awhile. I couldn't go back to school because basically I couldn't speak English at such. Oh I had mouthfuls that we'd picked up during the war
- 09:00 and stuff like that but I couldn't speak English. I couldn't go back to school. By that time I would a been what? Fifteen, sixteen and I went from job to job and my first job was on the Australian railway. The New South Wales railway. I put my age up because in those days at fifteen you earnt five cents and at sixteen you so I put me age up as high as I could and I worked there for quite awhile. No problems but not really what I wanted to do.
- 09:30 So from there, work was so easy to get. You could get any job. Somebody in Woy Woy started an ice run, like delivering blocks of ice. So I took that job on and then when everybody had their ice and stuff like that they upgraded to refrigerators. So I knew exactly who needed a refrigerator so I start selling refrigerators. Holstrom Refrigerators. Marvellous system. We had a truck with all the fridges on it
- 10:00 and we were floggin' 'em door and door and we could virtually drop 'em straight in the kitchen if you decided to buy one and made you know it was good money but it only lasted so long. So I went from job to job. I've been a tradesman carpenter for three days. I started on a Monday and the bloke said to me he said, "You a carpenter?" I said, "No, not really." I didn't know the difference between hardwood, softwood and but he gave me a week's pay and goodbye Jack and I just went from job to job. I travelled all over the country. I took on jobs in the bush
- 10:30 as jackaroo, sheep shearing. I had a contract going with the Wheat Board, repair silos and all that and then during the season sew bags. In those days there was no machinery and all that and tip bags and

load trucks and unload and all this business. It was bloody hard work. It was good money and I did that for a while. Worked at sheep stations, cattle stations and you name it. The reason I basically did that is I wanted to

- 11:00 be an Australian and I'm not being patriotic or anything but I've found in hindsight that the only way to learn a language and the people is go and live amongst 'em and never stay in a ghetto with your own crowd. The worst thing you can possibly do. There was no such thing as ethnic affairs and all this sort'a garbage and I learnt to speak a the English believe me. When I came home at one stage a the game we were still living at Woy Woy, the family was, and the bloke next
- 11:30 door was an ex-air force bloke and he'd just come from Darwin and he was cutting down a tree, I'll never forget this, and you know what the Australian language is like? "Oh bastard of a job," and stuff like that and I've heard that word used so often but I never knew really what it meant and I said to him I said, "Listen, what's this bastard thing?" and he said, "Look mate, anything that's no good believe me is a proper bastard." So a few days later I'm at his place and he showed me some Aboriginal souvenirs like spears and
- 12:00 stuff like that and he said, "Oh," you know he said, "they still throw 'em at one another." I said, "Jeez that must be a proper bastard," and he was gonna job on me because I swore in front of his family you know like and I couldn't bloody understand what the problem was. You know like here was a perfectly good English word. You know like you used it and you get into trouble and it took me quite a while to really realise you know like that the Australians spoke two languages, one in private and one amongst the boys. So having settled that particular
- 12:30 incident and growing up you know like at that age I remember well you know like, well you start to meet your first girls and stuff like that and some a the language that they taught me those girls I won't even mention that but I remember a German girl moved into Woy Woy and one a the blokes got very keen on. He said, "Jack do you speak German?" I said, "Yes," I said, "I know a few words." So I got my own back. I remember sitting in the pictures and somebody got his face slapped to no end and I thought, "Well, that's one
- 13:00 way of you know like, "getting the message across." I've never forgotten this and I went from there went back on the railway and national service had started so I became a draft dodger. No way was the system gonna tell me what I was gonna do with my time and stuff like that. If I wanted to join the army I was gonna do it at my steam. So I was a draft dodger. Joined the railway again and this time I joined as a cleaner to become a fireman and from there become a driver
- 13:30 and those you had to go through that system. That's okay. I was a cleaner for a short time because they had no young blokes to do the job. So I finished up becoming a fireman pretty quick in the game and from Hornsby depot I finished up virtually firing trains between Sydney and Newcastle. That was the main run. '38s yeah I've had a go at it. '36ers but the main job that really was from there was doing the Hawkesbury River
- 14:00 bank. Every morning you used to hook up the front of one of the great big expresses and give 'em a hand going from Hawkesbury River up to Cohan and believe me, if you want a earn your living that's bloody hard work and the shifts started at quarter past two in the morning and unfortunately that shift I got quite regularly and quite often. So one day I said to the boss I said, "I've had enough a this." You know I said, "How 'bout givin' a bloke a bit of a chance?"
- 14:30 and anyway the works weren't coming so I walked out. Had enough. You know like a young bloke. Enough of the shift work. Plenty of other jobs goin'. I'd already met my wife then. I met her when I was the ice man, delivering ice and they used to put in the window, "Ice, bread, whatever wanted," and all that you know like and I met her then and that things got a bit more serious. So I thought, "Jesus Jack." I said, "You better start settling down. Do something where you're," you know like, "don't go from job to job."
- 15:00 So I had a job offered to me with Ampol Petroleum company in New Guinea and I didn't think really that that was for me. So I was in Sydney and the recruiting place was at Martin Place in those days and Rushcutters Bay. So I thought, "Well bugger it," I said, "I'm gonna see the world." So I walked in there to join the navy. The bloke said to me he said, "Are you a British subject?" I said, "What's that? No. No mate." Well he told me to very politely to buzz off
- 15:30 and become a British subject first. So not to be undone I walked in next door and it was the air force. They told me the same thing. The army never asked stupid questions like that. So signed the necessary papers. I was told the following day to turn up at Rushcutters Bay. That night when I came home I said to my mother I said, "Well Mum," I said, "finally I've got myself a three year contract and I'm settling down." She said, "What did you do? Join the army?" "How did you know?" You know what I mean. Just an expression. She said, "You won't last five minutes."
- 16:00 I said, "Well, that remains to be seen." So I get myself to Rushcutters Bay and did my recruiting in Wagga Wagga, Kapooka, and being a Dutchman and all that the introduction to Australian slang was rather funny. Every morning before we started we had to do an emu bob and I wondered what the bloody hell an emu bob [picking up rubbish] really was. So you see people disappearing outside
- 16:30 and wandering 'round the huts and all that pickin' up bits a paper and stuff like that but I didn't know

that at that time. So we're out somewhere and I had to go to the toilet. So I said to the bloke I said he said, "What's up Jack?" I said, "I want to go for an emu bob." I thought that's what that meant you know what I mean. So I got a few queer looks. So then I found out that that was slightly different. So okay, you know like I had to learn. So I was called into the main

- 17:00 office and there was a few very irate officers sitting there and I was given the option of an immediate discharge or to become naturalised. I don't know what all the fuss was about. I said, "Oh well I might as well get myself naturalised." So they got everything going and I became naturalised in Gosford in uniform. So that didn't really go over too well with the Dutch community down there. In those days there were quite a lot a Dutch people live in Woy Woy and around down there. Well I through the press naturally being
- 17:30 naturalised in the must a been 9, well 1957 you know. I was early days and that really played on my family's mind for quite a bit. A, they weren't too keen me joining the army. Secondly that the Dutch community firstly wiped my family off the slate because you know like we lived close to the station and when the minister of the time came to visit like some a the communities they popped in an odd place for a cup a coffee and all that. So you know
- 18:00 when you're got class distinction in Holland what it is like if somebody draws a little bit more attention than somebody else the pettiness really comes to the fore. Well anyway I went back to Kapooka. I was just about ready to march out and then I thought, "Jesus I like the army," and I changed from the special reserve, which were the three year people, to the regular army. So I got discharged at one minute before midnight on one day and I re-enlisted at
- 18:30 midnight the following day and I got a new number and from three years I changed to six. Another difference was that the six year people paid for their pension and I really intended to join up macho what was it? Paratroopers, armoured corps or infantry. So I finished up in the engineers and I really enjoyed it. I marched into SME [School of Military Engineering], that's Liverpool, at
- 19:00 and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] down there was an ex, he's still alive old Joe, was an ex-Brit who had parachuted during the Second World War in Holland and you know what I mean and I became his run around and all that 'til I did the engineer basic courses and all that because field engineer you learn booby traps, explosives, road building, you name it. Well all the engineers do. You learn as a field engineer Class 3. That's the way you start off and I did all
- 19:30 that and a course came up, a language course Indonesian. Now I'd gone to school with Indonesian kids and all that. My father had been there. So I put my name down to learn to speak Eng, Indonesian and a few weeks went by. So I went to the boss and I said, "What's happening to this course?" He said, "Oh," he said, "we," you know I said, "we didn't even push the papers any further," and I said, "Why was that?" He said, "Well," he said, "a brilliant colleague of mine," you know, "a officer," he said, "he went for the course and he," you know like, "he miserably
- 20:00 failed and he found it very hard." He said, "Quite frankly he didn't think that a private soldier," you know what I mean, "had the brains to do that." I said, "Well sir," I said, "I hate to disappoint you," I said, "But I happen to be a Dutchman and I went to school with Indonesian kids." I said, "I already speak the language," which I didn't but he didn't bloody well know. You know and I said, "I think it's reasonably unfair to just assume because somebody's got it on their shoulders and somebody else is just starting off that they haven't got the brains to pass a language course." I said, "How well do you speak bloody Dutch?" you know. I was pretty browned off with it.
- 20:30 So when I got turfed out of the office in no uncertain terms I just happened to walk past the desk and there was a whole list of schools and courses going. So the first one that came up I put my name down and I got it and it was a quarter master course in a different corps. I didn't even know what I signed for you know what I mean. So anyway I got accepted and I changed corps and in the army's wisdom my first placing was right back in the unit where I was in their light aid
- 21:00 detachment. You just wear a different hat badge and oh they reckoned I was a traitor and stuff like that and anyway that was only done in good fun you know what I mean. You were lookin' after 'em pretty well but that's where I really got the basics in the rest of 'em my real army career with the engineers. Being an ex-engineer. Did all my time with the engineers. Did my basic promotion courses and I made corporal after a couple a years.
- 21:30 The team I was with was rather small. There was a warrant officer in charge and a corporal, Thaddus Crowe, and my job was to do all the spare parts, look after their tools, look after their welfare and stuff like that and I learnt scrounging the hard way. It was a fantastic team of blokes but whatever job had to be done there are rules and regulations to follow. If you're an LAD [Light Aid Detachment] you can only draw so many tools and spare parts. If it's your scope is too big it goes to a workshop and if
- 22:00 it gets beyond that it goes to a field workshop and then to a base workshop. So you can just imagine that at LAD level you quite often did a little bit more than you were supposed to do providing you could get the bits and pieces. The people working there were all fully capable of doin' any sort of work. So I learnt at a very early age how to get things and it got me into a bit a trouble because we had one machine, I'll never forget this, we had one machine a big truck and it had a machine on the back of it
- 22:30 and it had a Ford engine that was powering it and the petrol gauge broke down and for God, love nor

money no matter how hard I tried I could not get a petrol gauge that was exactly the same. I could get a six volt petrol gauge alright but the one they needed was a square one and all I could get was a round one. So that didn't worry Jackie too much. I just got one, bunged it in. I could now put it in and when the inspection team came around I think there was about fifteen reams of paper of illegal modifications to military equipment. Never mind

- 23:00 getting the job done, that's besides the point. Those people got to justify their existence and the crew I was with you know like, "Oh yes sir, no sir." You know they took the kick in the back side. You know like and following day just back to normal you know like and that's how I started off at a very early age in the army to get the job done and it's never gone against me. From there I went to various jobs. I finished up on the staff as the only
- 23:30 (UNCLEAR) bloke in an armoured unit. It was the 115 Royal New South Wales Lancers in Parramatta and my job was there was look after their workshop side on the staff. The rest were all CMF [Citizens Military Forces], part time people, and honestly the one a the officers down there wasn't the brightest in the thing. He yeah, I don't want to give the army really a bad name but I remember on the firing range he I gave all the firing orders
- 24:00 to get rid a the left over ammunition and he was firing a an Owen gun [machine gun] and he had a stoppage so he turned the damn thing sideways and started to shake it. So where I was standing I just give him a kick up the backside, kicked the gun out of his hand and I was nearly up for assaulting a senior officer or some baloney whatever until the truth came out and you know like I got away with that as easy as anything but that bloke was really a brainwave and it was a couple a months later we're on the range at
- 24:30 Liverpool and there was every year you go to the rifle range and all that and we had the first five self loading rifles that the army was being equipped with and I hadn't done my time on them. So it was decided that when the whole sheet was finished I was gonna give 'em a run through the gun. "This is a SLR [Self Loading Rifle]," you know like what it did and what it didn't do and the whole bloody lot and then they went to their butts and just had a few
- 25:00 shots out of it. So I'm going through this business and I got a couple a blokes standing around me and I could see this little body coming off the butts with a gun in his hand and came over. I finished what I was saying and I said, "What's up son?" See I was at the rank of corporal by then. You know like you can call people, "son," that was underneath and he said, "Oh we had a stoppage," and he said, "and the boss wants to change guns." I said, "Yeah, that's no problem." So I changed guns and I still don't know what made me say
- 25:30 this. "In a case like this what's the first thing you do?" "Safety because," and so I pulled the cocking handle back. No safety on. There's a live round up the spout. So I went all colours, finished what I was saying and went over to the butt and here's that same wonderless officer standing there and I said, "Excuse me, sir." See you can call people, "sir," and, "sir," in such a way that it means quietly the opposite. I said, "I've changed the gun," and I said, "did you carry out safety precautions?" "Oh yes," you know all that.
- 26:00 I said, "Then you explain this," and I showed him the live round. You know like and I said, "Just as well," you know, "there's people here." I said, "I would have liked to have wrapped this bloody thing around your neck," and anyway somebody heard me havin' a go at him and I got into trouble 'til I showed 'em exactly what happened but I didn't last long after that at Lancers. They had to get rid of me somehow. Also, I don't know if I should say that, we had two parade nights and one night my crew didn't
- 26:30 turn up but you still had to be there being on the staff and all that and this bloke wanted to join up and he just came out a gaol for being gay or whatever it is. I mean now it's accepted. In those days the army didn't want 'em and I just looked at his papers and all that and I just to and bloody up and told him, "I'll give you two seconds to get out a the gates." I said, "I'll," and anyway one a the CMF armoured officers were didn't particularly like the idea of me dismissing soldiers without them havin' a go and I said, "Well if that's the sort a people you want in the
- 27:00 army be my guest." You know I said I didn't really want to argue about it but the thing was the RSM at the time name was Cosgrove and he had a son who was at Duntroon and I got an idea that's now the great big Godfather we've got in Australia. I've never met him and I'm not saying it for any reason and all that but I think I served with his old man and he was quite a nice bloke. Really RSMs are normally not noted to be too candid but yeah that was a damn good crew of people.
- 27:30 They I really enjoyed it there but I just couldn't handle some of the antics.

So where was that again?

That would a been '58.

It was '58 and what was the place called that you were at?

115 Royal New South Wales Lancers.

115.

Oh yes. No it's a wonderful unit, it really was but you know you always meet characters down there you

know like they're not quite shape up. I remember that a TV [television] team came around to do all the old buildings.

28:00 All military buildings and all that. Much of what we're doing now actually and they came down with a whole crew and they were filming everything but not being in armoured I was told under no circumstances was I to show my face at out anywhere when those people are there. We had one Centurion tank and that got rolled out and anyway being not armoured I was in the oldest building they could possibly find down there. That was my office and all that. So of course when the whole business was finished, the bottom parts of my windows I remember

28:30 were whitewashed so I scratched a little hole in that so I could see what was going on and all that and when it came on TV the only thing that they showed was the Centurion tank and my bloody office. So that didn't go over too well. When I turned up on Monday morning I was kicked out of my office. Oh God Jesus you know like you know the talk about being childish and all that but that's the way it was in those days.

Before we go on

Mm.

From 115 can I actually now ask you a few questions

Mm.

Back in your growing up days.

Yeah.

29:00 **You shared at the beginning that your dad had worked I take it in Indonesia...?**

Yep.

Did you actually initially start to grow up in Indonesia?

No. No, he came back from Indonesia. He started off his own shop in Hilversum and met my mother in Nijmegen. The whole family the core was then, it's not all that close then but now you know like it is an hour's drive and they moved up to there and

29:30 I came about. He sold out up there and he went back to Nijmegen and opened up his own butcher shop in conjunction with the rest of the family, like just main shop and a side shop and yeah, few things happened down there that would never happen again. My mother was just her parents what, he was an engineer with the power mob but not being a Vandam and not being in this business and all that my

30:00 mother wasn't really accepted in the Vandam family. They had all these classes things you know like they fancy themselves to be something what they never were. My old man wasn't like that but the rest of the family they're were pretty well to do. They you know they lived in a damn mansion in town and all that. I don't really remember my grandfather on my father's side as such. I remember my grandmother really well. She was a wonderful old lady and they were pretty hard.

30:30 You know like they were typical bloody ignorant Dutchmen as far as I was concerned, as I learnt in later years, but my mother was never really accepted in the family and I'm doin' a fair bit of genealogy and I found out that anybody in the family going all the years back that ever married for some reason the second time they were never accepted and the kids were never accepted. It was quite an interesting thing. However

So may I ask...

Mm.

What do you remember of your grandfather and grandmother?

My I remember my grandf...

31:00 oh my grandmother she was wonderful. You know like but the rest of the family there was always a fair bit of friction. My father being what he was he wasn't the youngest, he was the second youngest, and you know being at the bottom of the pecking order when the main shop got bombed out in '44 the rest of the family just moved into my old man's shop and you know like he finished up being the hired hand more than you know like being his own business man so to speak. So that didn't go over too well. So there was a fair bit of trouble there.

31:30 So the opportunity he took to give the whole lot away was the best thing that he ever could have done. We never went back to, well we went to school but I never could finish my schooling and stuff like that. We had big gaps in it. Well school was partly bombed at one stage of the game so you just finished up in any big room somewhere you know like with your class and all that and I reckon that I've had a very, very good basic education but I just never had the chance to finish off what I really intended to

32:00 do and in hindsight I'm really glad it turned out that way.

Your mum, was that your dad's second wife or

No. First wife. They're all the way through and her family were just ordinary people. Well wonderful people. I stayed with them for quite a while when we got after we moved out. It was just on the end of the war. We had to leave the shop we were in near the hospital so my father

- 32:30 we got another place and all that. It wasn't all that big so I stayed with my grandparents for quite awhile. The distances weren't all that great. So a bit a family disruption. There was a war goin' on. There was rebuilding going on. You know like life was pretty hectic all the way through but like everything else you know like you either survive or you don't. So the decision make to go overseas I think honestly was the right one. My family found it pretty hard here for the first
- 33:00 while. My mother couldn't speak English. My father couldn't speak English. I learnt French at school, God help us, and my younger brother learnt to speak English at school and even today I think my English is better than his will ever be but that's a matter of argument. He learned it properly, I learned it decently and I've got a younger sister. They're all in Australia, the whole family came out, and I don't see much of my sister. I see my brother occasionally and all
- 33:30 that. They come here or whatever. My parents are both dead now and my father wanted to open up a butcher shop in Woy Woy where we lived. I wasn't interested in becoming a butcher. Neither was my younger brother. So I joined the army, became a butcher in a way anyhow according to the good Australian public when I came back from Vietnam. So in a way I kept the family tradition goin'. The thing was that my father worked for a butcher in Woy Woy
- 34:00 and he started to cut up the meat the Dutch way, you know like traditional Dutch way which took a damn sight longer. In Australia in those days everything you could cut off a carcass was a steak. Either a flat one, a thick one, a thin one, a fatty one, a you name it but my old man did it the proper way. So we picked up virtually all the customers in the district but it took more time and all that and anyway he was offered a shop but seeing he didn't want to do it on his own and he was getting a bit older too. So
- 34:30 he then got a job working for Mayfair up at Homebush and he worked there virtually 'til he retired. He enjoyed what he was doin' and yeah, that's just about how we started off and never any regrets in the family. They went back to Holland for holiday. My brother's been back a few times. My sister's been back. I've got absolutely no intentions a going back under any circumstances and the reasons are quite
- 35:00 easily explained really. I believe that there is more to see in Australia. I've travelled all over Australia. Name a place and I've been there. Privately, army wise and stuff like that and every time I get we pack our bags and off we go Australia wise. I like to remember Holland as I remember it. Every time my brother comes back and all that he reckons the place has changed to the point you know what I mean now. So why go back? If I want to get in contact with Dutch people, see what it's like I buy a video and watch that. I can do it here
- 35:30 and Dutch people, I know a few of 'em around the place. I don't go out of my way meetin' 'em.

Can I ask in respect to Holland...

Mm.

When you were living there, do you have any memories of sort of grandparents or even parents speaking of World War I?

No. No not really. The people next door to us were French and they were

- 36:00 refugees from World War I but nobody spoke about World War I as such. No. I don't remember speaking anybody that we knew and learnt at school there was such a thing as World War I but it was never it never came up in any conversation whatsoever. Nijmegen is the oldest town in Holland and it's got a history right back to Julius Caesar and even the Huns of being you know like a battle area. No, they just don't the Dutch just don't talk about that. My father, as I say, is
- 36:30 well he's been through the bombardments and stuff like well we all went through that. My grandfather he was on night shift at the power station, which was always a target, and he was on three or four storeys high watching the events takin' place and he got blasted through a glass window four storeys down on top of a great big pile of waste wool and all he got was a bad shake. If you talk about the luck of the devil with the Vandams
- 37:00 you know like some a things that we've been through it's really a bit of a surprise that you know like most of us made it pretty well in one piece. We lived in Holland in the forested part, like in the bush so to speak and all my spare time was taken up in the bush. I love the bush. I feel at home there. The border was only what, five minutes away. So
- 37:30 quite often if you wander into Germany and all that after the war was finished where the paratroopers landed and all the 52nd we went through places like that and to find pieces of equipment and shot down gliders and stuff like that oh for a long time after the war, which is as common as muck. You know like I mean if you went into the souvenir trade in hindsight you know like you could a made a fortune but I mean nobody thought of those things. You know like you just well a), you was pretty young. You just more or less grew
- 38:00 up with it. It just was an accepted token of life. We never really went through the bad parts that

Amsterdam did with the starvation and hunger as such. Having a butcher shop and all that there was always means and ways of you know like of finding something to eat. One thing that always plays on my mind I used to we were brought up very strict Catholic and I've got family that are nuns and priests and all that and I

38:30 remember goin' to church on a Sunday morning and there'd be some priest saying about the bad parts a the black market and stuff like that. You know how bad it was and all that and you wouldn't be home five minutes you know like and there'd be the phone ringin' and, "Oh we got the bishop coming," you know, "what can you do?" type a thing you know what I mean and as a kid I've never really forgotten the hypocrisy and that sort a thing. Also well known cases of churches being bombed and there was more food in there you could poke a stick at and the idea was, "Well if I give

39:00 somebody a slice a bread," you know what I mean, "Somebody else will complain." I can understand all that but it turned me against religion a little bit.

We'll just pause there

Mm.

It's end of the tape.

Tape 2

00:42 **Ah Jack you were about to share a story about your grandfather**

Mm.

And the eggs and the cherries.

Yes. We're coming back to, this is still got to do with food. There was an opportunity given to people where you could have a plot outside the town that was a bit of a market garden.

01:00 My father had one in a place called the B(UNCLEAR), which was between Arnhem and Nijmegen, and it's famous for its cherries and although we never had a plot down there, he knew somebody who knew somebody and all that and we went down across the bridge and we got to get food and it was cherry time at the time and I remember we brought back a great big basket of cherries. When we approached the bridge, there was a

01:30 check on. No matter what you had the Germans were confiscating it. My father being what he's like he said, "Like bloody hell." So we sat on the side of the road. It was my father, myself and my younger brother and we ate each and every cherry that was in that basket of cherries. It took us quite awhile and now even now after all those years you mention the word, "cherries," I can still we ate the bloody lot. No way the Germans were gonna get those bloody cherries. On my grandfather's side of it, they

02:00 lived on the other side of the town and that was across one of the canals and he had a plot that had a plot and whatever it was and we went across the bridge down there and we came back on push bikes with food and in amongst the food were eggs and each egg was individually wrapped up in newspaper and it was all in a nice bag and we had bags on the back of the bike and all that and lo and behold down there raids

02:30 on on the bridges. We couldn't get across the bridges. So we had to make a great, because that was smuggling, so we had to make a monstrous great big detour to get across another bridge across this canal on push bike and anyway my grandfather, he knew the way and we got across the canal alright and we're going through paddocks and all that on the push bikes and the bike hit a rut. So I can see him going head over heels off his bike in such a way he's hanging onto this bag

03:00 with the eggs on you know what I mean and he's well and truly going. He got bruised and all up and anyway when we got home we unwrapped all the, we got through it alright. We unwrapped all the thing and there was one cracked egg and I remember my grandmother doin' her crumpet because there was a cracked egg. You know here we are risking our Goddamn bloody lives, firstly being at shot at smuggling food and all that but if anybody would a seen him going off his bike and the way he tried to do it you know. Like the mentality of the Dutch. You know like no wonder they get a bad name

03:30 in places. Yeah I it's things like that that keep coming back to you you know like, they I don't think the Dutch are really known for a great sense a humour. You know like it's it doesn't mean much but in those days eggs were virtually unobtainable and a cracked one, well for God's sake you know all you got to do is take the shell off and make an omelette out of it. I can't see problems with the little things like that, I never could that was the sort of everyday life like you know

04:00 like to go and wherever you could get food you just went out and get it. If you got caught well we were lucky, never got caught. There's always people saying, "Oh," you know like, "Watch it," and stuff like that. I remember in the street we lived in during the war it was a very short street. There was a butcher shop. On the other end of the street was a lolly shop cum a bit a this and a bit a that and a tobacco shop and three doors, there was only what about ten, twelve houses I

04:30 think it was and there was a Jewish family living there and I remember the Gestapo coming there and rounding them all up and taking them away and they never were heard of seen again. I mean those are the sort of things that you know like nobody talked about you just but what could you do? The main shop we had in Holland, next door was a trading family. There was a shop where you could just buy like Go-Lo. Whatever you wanted they sold it and they were Jewish

05:00 and the people there were known as Glazer was their name, G-L-A-Z-E-R. Glazer or whatever you want to call it, the Jew, that he was known in the town as Glazer the Oat. That was the Dutch part of you know like in the oh they were, Jesus, they were just friends you know what I mean. Jesus, you grew up with them. They were never heard and seen of again you know like during and after the war but those sort a things you normally don't remember, you don't talk about or stuff

05:30 like that. Yeah, that was just the sadder part of normal occurrences.

What are your memories of the Jews? Did they keep to themselves or did they interact

Some did, some didn't. The only time we found some people were Jewish because when the Germans insisted they had the great yellow star to wear. You know like in hindsight my grand my father's mother's maiden name was Schoenburger and that you could take as a good Jewish name, although they weren't

06:00 Jewish. You know like I don't know whether that caused any problems. I'm not aware of it but people we knew, people we knew quite well all of a sudden appeared with a yellow star on their clothing. You know like and well unfortunately a lot of 'em you know like we never heard of and never seen again but that yeah, that was just one of the sad parts and the normal parts of growing up in Holland during the war. The Germans treated us quite decently actually. Sadly as far as the

06:30 German army was concerned I lived we lived very close to a barracks and every so often the German bands used to come up you know like the army bands and all that and you know like we didn't like 'em, don't get me wrong, but they never I can never really in all honesty say that they went out of their way, the average German soldier were no different to any other soldier. That that's my honest opinion. The behind our shop was a great big Ford

07:00 garage and all that and they took that over and they worked there you know like repairing vehicles and all that and you know like quite often you know like well there was plenty a German soldiers around town. As kids you got a pat on the head you know what I mean. I never seen really any unpleasantness with the average German soldier. Gestapo and the black dressed ones yeah, well we never saw many of 'em but you normally stayed well clear of that sort a the lot and people you didn't know

07:30 who you stayed well clear of you know. Like I mean the distrust was you know like just as per normal but then again your life just had to go on and you just did the best you could.

So was anyone in your family involved in the resistance?

No and I'm saying that with a smile on my face.

Why are you saying it with a smile on your face?

Well

08:00 no, officially as far as I know, no. If you talk to my brother, yes. He even wears a Dutch declaration. I don't know where he found it but yeah, well this is a touchy one. Yeah he fancies himself you know like being part of he was two years younger than me. At the gentle age of about five or six he must have been a resistance leader.

08:30 He hasn't quite worked out yet that there was an age difference but he fancies himself to be something that he never was. It's a bit of a sore point but you know like as far as I'm aware, no. He reckons that the declaration he wears came from my father. Me being the oldest and me joining the army and knowing my father and my wife will bear me out in there, like he would a been so proud if we had a declaration. If it had to be passed down the family that I would at least would have known about it. So there's a bit of you know. Yeah, I'm

09:00 always a bit suspicious of people. I've met Dutch people that came to Australia and when you listen to 'em they always had a sandwich with ham. You know they're always so good. So why come all the way to Australia you know what I mean to be what they never were. For that's another reason why I never actually mix with 'em. You know like I don't like to

09:30 really say it but you know like to me it's just so much empty bullshit. Pardon my French but that's exactly the way it is. They're different. I've met some good ones, don't get me wrong but basically they're entirely different in their way of life and the whole set up is different you know. The I remember we went to a Dutch dance in Woy Woy with my wife and it was raining and in those days all the dunnies were outside. So

10:00 she had a flimsy dancing shoes on and I hate dancing. To me it's just a funny way of walking you know like but anyway I got dragged into this and we're dancing away and anyway she had to go to one of the dunnies and I didn't like to see her get her feet wet so I picked her up and I carried her through all the

mud. We were virtually kicked out of the dance hall. There wasn't the sort a thing done in Holland you know like and I said, "Well I'm not in bloody Holland," you know what I mean and that was one of the main reasons very early in the day that

10:30 I just you know if I meet one okay. If I don't, I don't. I just don't worry about 'em.

Now you you'd said a little bit about the Jews getting a hard...

Mm.

...time obviously.

Mhm.

Did you know of or did your family know of any other families that were hiding the Jews at that time from the Nazis?

If we did you didn't talk about it. It was just a taboo subject because let's face it, if my father and mother knew and we knew, if they wanted to find out I don't think you

11:00 know like it would take much of a cracking point to get the truth out of 'em. So if you look at it from that point of view, what you didn't know you couldn't talk about. So, no. If it happened we never knew at the time or it was never discussed afterwards. It just not it didn't happen. Most probably did I don't I honestly don't know.

After the war, 'cause you stayed in Holland to continue your studies or finish your studies

Well finish

11:30 my schooling off.

Yeah. Did there, were you at all reminded of the great heroes during the war? People like Corrick and Boon and things like that?

Up to a point. See the thing was to get on with your life but one thing was, the Nijmegen Bridge was a centre point in Holland to get up. It was had to be liberated in order to relieve

12:00 the battle of Arnhem and it was all set to be blown up and there was a Dutchman and his name was Jan Van Hoef. He was in the resistance and he actually cut the wires and after it happened and all that he was on an armoured vehicle and on the escape part of it so to speak he got shot not all that far from where our shop was and they built a monument to him. Now he is a hero in

12:30 the town. The Americans of course take credit for it and all that, as they normally do. They take credit for everything but it was Jan Van Hoef that cut in fact the wires and he got accredited with it and there's no arguments about that. Now he was definitely accredited what he deserved and he was mentioned quite a few times. You know like I know where the monument is and all that and yeah, we all regard him as a bloke that actually did something because that bridge is so many inches

13:00 smaller than the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Exactly the same shape and very much the thing and it was fought over quite a bit during the Second World War. We were the staging point for nearly all the activities in Germany. We had, as I say, troops billeted in all place. We had, what Canadian military police and they were nice blokes, as much as I dislike military police. We've had Brits. We had another big works, they were

13:30 RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] blokes incidentally, like mechanics and stuff like that. We had the Coldstream Guards armoured brigade staying with us and my father's younger sister got keen on one of the officers. She was single in those days and he came back at one stage of the game and he was wounded in battle and all that and nothing ever came out of it. Then we had some Americans staying down there. We were still a target from Germany.

14:00 We were mortared. We had I remember one mortar attack that lasted forty hours. On the sheer mortar attack from Germany of in coordination with the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes and stuff like that. They tried a lot of diversions and stuff like that and, as I say, coming on the border, strategic bridge, staging point, yeah we came under attack there a fair bit. We survived all that without any trouble. Got bombed that for the bridge and I got I didn't get hurt, oh

14:30 I might have had a few scratches and stuff like that but I mean that was just a normal occurrences and it'd be quite often you'd be playing outside you know what I mean and the plane comes over and it's just strafing the whole lot up and normally it'd finish up being shot down and the pilot, if it survived, always finished up at our place because we had the provos [Provosts - Military Police] staying there and I remember one a those clowns got shot down and he had a complete leather overalls and it was rather small but anyway it was too oh that was given to

15:00 us as a souvenir and my mother finished up after the war giving it to the rag and bone man. It was beautiful complete heavy leather overalls with all the heating systems in and all that. Yeah, as a matter of fact I saw the bloke the survivor, like he was brought in and then you know like well they finished up going to more secure places. You know they oh yeah but just normal occurrences. I've got to really start thinking you know like anything

15:30 that stands out. We also learnt how to make fire crackers out of shells and all that. Take the cap off, take the powder out you know. Like put 'em in American beer cans and light 'em up and you know oh the best fire works you could get out. You know like the stupid things you did. You know like it's just yeah, I know it's you shouldn't actually talk about that. You shouldn't actually remember it but you know we weren't the only ones doing it. It's just part and parcel of it.

So school continued as normal during those years?

No. You had

16:00 disruptions. Schools got bombed and you know places had to be found. I remember not long after the school I did I finished one of my classes in a private house that had a very big room. The word just got around you know like right, turn up there and of course if you wanted to wag school that was quite simple. Yeah, I think schooling got disrupted a fair bit. Another thing, in wintertime we lived near one place and after snow you could get your toboggans down

16:30 there. So of course when during school time you know that was more important than actually going to school. Yeah, I think it disrupted quite a bit of schooling for quite a lot a people. Then things settled down and I went back to school and the Catholic mob set up a the first Catholic Technical College and their system's slightly different than it is here and I enlisted in

17:00 that and you could either go become at higher levels going through the university or you could do it through the technical side and I was gonna do it through the technical side. It meant going to school during the day. There you learned it not so much as an apprenticeship. All the stuff was in the classroom so to speak and you learned everything in whatever trade you followed but there was only two trades when it first opened up and it was fitting and turning and carpentry and I took on fitting and turning and at night

17:30 time I went to school for higher education to become a civil engineer. When it became apparent we were going to go to Australia I knew real relatively then that I couldn't go back to school and the teacher that I had, he was a fantastic bloke. He enrolled me, by putting up my age, in a welding class and I learned oxy welding and cutting there way above the level of what I should have. I've got the

18:00 certificate here. I've still got that and when I got to Australia of course that wasn't worth the paper it was written on. The, not that it mattered much, but yeah that's a different story but when I came to Australia I worked for Tub Briens in Asquith as a welder's offsider and I turned up for work on day on a Monday morning, I'll never forget this, and they're all sittin' outside the gate and they had this funny thing on that this strike and I wondered what a strike was and any when I

18:30 found out it appeared they had a leaking tap washer in the men's changing room and I couldn't quite work out what that had to with sittin' outside the gate. So I said, "Oh give us a couple a spanners. I'll go and fix it," you know. Like oh God Jesus did that get me into trouble. You know like that wasn't done. That didn't belong to the union or some bloody thing. So when the strike finished I lost a week's pay. I work for money. I make no bones about that and I chucked it in.

19:00 You know like I thought, "Jesus Christ if you've got to become a tradesman in this country and every five minutes there's a leakin' tap washer gonna lose a week's pay." I said you know, "There's not much bloody future there," you know to pursue a trade and so I let my trade go and well I was just still part and parcel of going from job to job. I wouldn't join a union. No way. I'm not against it, don't get me wrong, but when it comes to losing a week's pay over a bloody leaking tap washer I drew the line

19:30 you know. I couldn't quite handle that but anyway the

Coming, sorry...

Yeah.

Coming back to Holland again...

Mm.

How did the township change when the Americans and the allies came into the town and the Germans left?

Well the whole town had to be rebuilt. The town got flattened in '44, February '44. It was already started to be done.

20:00 You know like I mean like cleared up. We lost a playground at the school because that just became a rubble heap and I'm not talkin' about a few tonne. I'm talkin' about a rubble heap. The whole town was there in other parts and all that. When the Americans took over, the town slowly and surely started to get back on an even keel. They rooted out all the German and Nazi sympathisers and things just started to go back to a rather

20:30 normal fashion. We never took it against the Americans for having bombed the town by mistake. The Germans used it as propaganda. I remember the signs going up, "With friends like that, who needs enemies," type of thing and all that but I mean that it was just a sad occurrence. I mean nobody enjoyed it, don't get me wrong. A lot of people the biggest casualty rate was not so much the direct bombing but

it was the all clear was sounded right at lunch time and then it started off

21:00 again like the danger signal, the sirens went off again, and a lot a people were still in underground shelters and all that. Now when you get four or five storeys on top of an underground shelter let's say underneath a great big store, those people couldn't get out and they suffocated or just cooked to death. A lot a the casualties were the results from that being an all clear right at the lunch time. Everybody outside you know going in for lunch and stuff like that and yeah I think that was the big rate but that was Jesus, we could see Germany virtually burn every night after the raids

21:30 were over. We were right on the path of the bombing from the night time from the Brits and from the Yanks during the day and it always in aerial fights going on. You know like and planes being shot down. I mean it just yeah, it just you know like just part a life. I mean I've seen planes shot down. I've, as I said before, I said I escaped one that was gonna fall on top of a tram. I got out of you know like just instinct or sixth sense. I honestly don't know. That killed a

22:00 few people but you just didn't think of things like that. You just didn't.

Did you lose school mates and families that you knew during particularly the February '44 bombing?

Lost a cousin, which I really didn't know well because you know like jeez we were only kids ourselves. You know like no, not really that I could really remember the after the war I did learn that on my mother's side

22:30 of the family a couple of 'em escaped or tried to get to Spain and to England and all that to get in the underground and one of 'em was caught and he spent time in one a the concentration camps. Matter of fact he came to Australia on a holiday oh this is years ago when we first came here but I don't really nobody talked about that. You know like and people are dead. You can't bring 'em back type a thing you know. Like it's

23:00 the schooling too you were disrupted, you were in different classrooms and stuff like that. Somebody could a snuffed it and it could been just in a different classroom. I dare say that most probably it would have happened at some stage of the game and totally unaware from it. It's just bit hard to explain really. It's just one of those things. I mean that was with you all the time. It's you know it's just you came out of it you did, you did and well it's no use arguin' about it. It's not gonna change it.

23:30 **You may have been a bit too young to answer this question...**

Mm.

But brothels, did you know of anything like that and how they changed with the Germans and Americans?

No.

No?

No. Undoubtedly they were there. The no I honestly don't. I another thing, Jesus being good Catholics and all that those things didn't occur. You know like I mean that's fantasy land. The reality in that sort of atmosphere just doesn't exist but in jokin'

24:00 aside or anything no, I'm not honestly aware. As a matter of fact if you asked me if I knew of any in the town I wouldn't have a clue. Undoubtedly they were there. I don't know.

And you mentioned your dad's sister took a liking to one of...

Yeah, yeah. Terry I can't think, yeah. Yeah, he was a Coldstream Guard.

Anything happen there?

No. No, they just they were billeted and all that. They got friendly and that's about as far as it goes. Yeah.

24:30 She only died what, Christmas before last. She was the youngest sister and the last surviving member is Edith. Passed away now or on the way out. She's ninety-five and she weighs thirty-five kilos. I've got that over Christmas in one of the emails. I don't really I remember the name and all that but I don't really can say that I remember. Often that's the last surviving member of my father's brothers and sisters.

25:00 See the thing was, being good Catholics they bred like rabbits. You had seventeen brothers and sisters. You know they 'til they had a radio. I think that might have changed things, I don't know but they had a large family and not all of 'em survived and his father's a lot a into genealogy. A lot a the kids were you know like childbirth and all that but I am in touch with a cousin whose kids are coming in a couple a weeks' time, like backpacking, and

25:30 his father was my brother's, my father's younger son. No, his father's my father's younger brother and on one a the emails he said too that he couldn't get on with the rest of the family and he lived a couple a streets from us and I remember vaguely playing with kids that were cousins and now I'm back with the

email and I only started a couple a years ago and you know what we're exchanging some information down there that

26:00 you know like that makes the world rather small because into genealogy I'm also now emailing stuff with a common great, great grandmother and her name was a Henderson and that was a union from one a the Henderson that stayed back when the British were fighting for one a the Dutch wars they've had and in that side

26:30 of the genealogy there's quite a lot of history down there. In I'm also finding, and I haven't quite connected it up yet, a Vandam that had his own army in Holland, the Hunters of Vandam. I've got a whole book on it and I've got a whole lot and I'm close to winding it up but as it is now, no pick ups yet but when you look into genealogy, if you're on the bottom of the pecking order you know what I mean you're just in large families you just don't exist. They don't want to know ya

27:00 you know.

Just again

Mm.

Remaining in Holland

Mm.

In respect of the church you've mentioned a few things about the Catholic church.

Mm.

What are your memories actually of...

Well being a good Catholic and I was an altar boy and I was a choir boy and all this sort a bull. You know you had to do that because you know like your father said, "Go and do it," and being at a Catholic school and all that. The you know like I was never molested or anything like that. None of that business.

27:30 The what I didn't like about it really was the hypocrisy. Like Don engaged in the black market but you know what can you do? You know what I mean then it became alright for them and in hindsight you know what I mean I've never been a great believer of if God was so wonderful why could he have a war like it was in the Second World War? You know because the German Catholics would have prayed to the same bloody God that the Brits and the you know he could only take the sides of one. Once you start to think a little bit

28:00 you know like those questions are never to be answered. I did make the mistake at school answering a asking a question like that once and I think my father had to go to school and write fifty lines and pray so many Hail Mary's and all that to get forgiven just because you weren't to think like that and it made me all the more determined to you know, "Nice knowin' ya," type a thing but I have got family that one another thing too, when we left to go to Australia my

28:30 mother's mother's sister was a nun in one part of Holland and she belonged to a teaching order and my mother went with the whole family to say goodbye to her and all that and she had to get special permission from the bishop to go to actually to a tea room to have a cup of coffee or cup of tea with us. You know those things weren't done. She wasn't allowed out. You know like and even as a kid I could never understand that sort of bull. That's frankly what it is. I mean I don't think

29:00 she went out to go out with her boyfriend or whatever, that sort a thing. Why she had to get special permission to have a cup a tea to say goodbye to the family and all that. I don't believe in any of that system. Now or years ago, even in the army I've never been one for rules and regulations that were you know a bit stupid and thick to the core.

Growing up in the town...

Mm.

When the war was on did you think you were a part of the German side

29:30 **or the allied side or none?**

Oh the allied side. Oh yes. We were never encouraged to you know like to take anything of the German side, yet one of my father's sisters married a German. That's the shop we went into near the hospital but that was way before the war and all that and I'm still in touch with their kids well, Annie is just my age. You know only on email and all that but he wasn't a he was just we came from the German

30:00 border you know what I mean. As a matter of fact the family lived in Glebe for a long time, which was then part of Holland, and he was a fantastic bloke because after the war and this is another thing you reminded me of, we on the town they built a village, a new village type a thing and we finished up getting one a the houses there and it bordered, all gardens bordered right onto the back part of the military

30:30 barracks and there was a great big wooden fence around there so you couldn't look into it but being

kids, I climbed up there one day and here is my uncle, the German uncle, gardening. You know like and I couldn't quite believe it. Uncle Ben. You know what I mean. So I told my father and all that and you know what I mean. He survived the war and after the war Dad went back to Germany and as a matter of fact the kids still lived there. They're dead now. Yeah, that's one of the things here was so when you

31:00 say, "Did you hate the Germans?" or such, I can't say that I really hated my uncle. He was well I don't know whether he was for or against. He never wore a uniform or anything. He was a butcher and he was in the family way before you know like any war started and that was quite a common occurrence. I mean there was nothing new about that. The people next door to us were survivors from the First World War in France. Not that they ever talked about it but that you know like they're just part of

31:30 the community. End of story type a thing. Yeah, I think that I don't think my father really liked my his sister all that much you know what I mean. You know what emotions are like. You know what I mean, "Bloody Huns this, that and the other," but I don't think there was ever any reason to really take that to the point that it meant anything. You know it's just one of those things. He just happened to be a German and he just happened to live here.

Were you receiving any news like from the

32:00 **BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] about the war and that sort of stuff?**

By word of mouth. Yes, we knew the landings had taken place. We knew of the battle of the Ardennes. We knew that liberation was coming. Oh yes, but that was word of a mouth. The radios we had was all pumped propaganda from Germany and places like that. Oh some pretty decent music but every so often you know what I mean. You're not bothered listening to it. Yes, the word of mouth was quite good. Yeah, we always knew

32:30 what was going on. Where that came from you know like it just appeared. Well we were only kids. They definitely wasn't gonna tell us the source of that you know what I mean but yes, we knew pretty well what was going on.

Do you remember the day that the war was declared over?

Oh yes. Yes I remember that. Word got around and there were celebrations everywhere and all that and you know like and it wasn't long after that that all the German sympathisers got rounded up and all the women that played around with Germans had all their hair shaven off and all

33:00 that and you know like and people that you thought were your best mates all of a sudden you know like were on the end of a gun. You know like just shifted off. Oh yes, I mean you know like and nobody greatly cared. Yeah there were celebrations but they just life was back normal because one of the things that a lot of people don't realise, even when you see it presented, not many shops open. Wasn't a great lot of traffic of food going on you know what I mean. You still have to bloody well live. You know what I mean so life either had to go on pretty quick or you just starved

33:30 where you stood. So you had to make a great big effort to get back to normal as quick as you could because it just straight out rate of survival. One of the things was in our butchering system, every Monday morning we went to the markets and we bought our own cattle at the markets and that. They were killed at the abattoirs and then it was distributed out and that was an old tradition and that went back pretty quick, as quick as we could organise

34:00 that but cattle wasn't all that easy to come by because a lot of 'em were survivors in the war. I mean if you drop a bomb in a paddock you know if there was a cow there it's goodbye cow too. I mean so that went on as best as we could. The aid the Americans must have started to pour food in at some stage of the game because I remember the tins of spam and I remember the Brits had a bakery not all that far

34:30 from us and they were baking bread and you know like the odd loaf of bread appeared from places like that. They were quite generous a lot of things. One thing is I remember the Yanks would do anything for a bottle of ketchup, tomato sauce or whatever it was. They used to any shop they used to knock on the door in the middle of the night and all that where they could get ketchup and we never knew what it was 'til it was tomato sauce. You know like they yeah, it was a big thing with them. Why the American army could never supply that I honestly couldn't understand

35:00 because we in the neck of the woods we were there was a great big school or All Brothers and all like that. The Yanks took that over as depot, supply depots and they used to come and they used to go. Not far from the railway, as I said, and you know like as kids you spent a hell of a lot of time you know like in places like that and whenever you could scrounge any food and all that you know what I mean. A few tins here and a few things there. I mean it always found a place at

35:30 home and I mean it was just life as per normal. I came home with a jeep once. Yeah oh God Jesus my dear. I remember the hiding I got from my mother too.

What happened there with the

Well there's a great big, in that same place it was empty. Everything had moved out and there's this jeep parked there. You know like and I thought, "Now who would leave a jeep behind?" So anyway a couple of the kids and all that we just pushed it home. You know I don't know whether it was somebody there tidying up somewhere. Went through every room and all the stuff they left behind you know like you

could nearly

- 36:00 equip an army with. You know like I mean there was nothing wrong with it. I just didn't know how to drive it. So that disappeared. I don't know who finished up with that but you know what I mean I just it was a common way of life in those days. You know like in hindsight you know like and then well you went back to school and you know things started to normalise as much as you could possibly get life back to normal. I mean we went when we lived in that
- 36:30 village that they built you know like it's just a whole new neck a the woods and all that and well from there you went to school but that was right on the edge of the very high part of Holland. There was one little part not far from where we actually lived where Claudius Civilis stood grinding his teeth when he saw the Hun hordes advance on his legions. You know like I mean the whole area down there goes right back to the dim dark ages of occupation of some sort of the game. The Charles the Great had
- 37:00 there's ruins down there, catacombs in the town and stuff like that that are still there and the fighting around there was absolutely very, very vicious to keep the bridge out a the Americans hands there. The Germans well and truly put up a hell of a lot a resistance but that whole area where we lived in was high and Holland being flat, you know like your the command of distance was absolutely phenomenal and it was all wooded and, as I say, as I grew up in the woods and
- 37:30 love it. We spent a hell of a lot a time down there and quite often you found abandoned bunkers and stuff like that that were there. You know like and you had to be a bit careful there because not that I remember getting into any booby traps or anything but I mean to find bits of guns and guns and shells and ammunition. Another thing is that if you had an open fire you had to be very careful too because a lot of shells that would explode. They'd get into a tree and if they don't explode, you cut it up for firewood and put it in your stove.
- 38:00 There were after the war quite a few instances where you're sitting around the fire and all of a sudden the bloody stove blows up you know what I mean. So yeah, in now it sounds funny but at the time I can assure you it wasn't all that funny in the middle for no reason whatsoever you know like the stove goes 'bang'. Yeah, that's just one a those things.

You mentioned why the your father was given some options of countries to go to

Mm.

And chose Australia. What did

- 38:30 **you know of Australia at the time?**

What we knew of Australia that there was a few cities along the coast and if you wanted to eat something you just catch a kangaroo that just hops from street to street. It was a very tropical country and the people were very friendly and all that. It was a land of opportunity. If you wanted to get your finger out and you wanted to do a day's work the opportunities were there and the impression was we couldn't get there quick enough 'til we hit Bathurst in the middle of winter and we found out that we left all the

- 39:00 winter clothing behind thinking that we're going into the sub tropics. You know like in God's paradise and all that. The yes, I think we had a few cold mornings. So...

We'll just stop there.

Mm.

Tape 3

- 00:48 **You were going to tell me about your impressions of the Germans.**

Mm. Well we didn't like bein' occupied, that's one thing. I mean let's face it we're Dutchmen and they're Germans and you know like

- 01:00 what you heared and word a mouth and all that you just didn't go out a your way to meet Germans but German soldiers as such, and I'm talkin' about the average German soldiers. They were just people call up like the Brits, the Americans and everything else were. When they saw you as kids on the street quite often they used to give you a pat on the head and you know like a if they had a lolly or something you know like and I mean they just treated you I don't think that the average German soldier went out of his way to make himself unpleasant.

- 01:30 That most probably doesn't go over too well with the Dutch community and all that and quite rightly so because a lot of 'em gave the German army a pretty bad sort of a name. I mean if you were SS [Schutzstaffel- Nazi special forces], and you always knew who was SS and who was German army by the uniform they wore, and you know if you saw anybody in a leather raincoat or leather overcoat and all that you made sure that you were nowhere near I mean you just stayed well and truly away but

02:00 the average German bloke as far as I'm concerned was no different to anybody else and as kids you'd really didn't greatly you know like, as I say, you didn't go out a your way to shake hands with 'em but on the same token if you happened to bump into 'em they'd usually give you a pat on the head you know what I mean and that was it. No different to any other human being really all said and done and that's all in all honesty.

What about the other Dutch people? You said that they had different attitudes. What did they think of the Germans?

Well if you had people most probably lost or you

02:30 were collaborating with the Germans or stuff like that, which a hell of a lot a Dutch people were, you know like I mean my father and mother most probably wouldn't take too kindly me saying what I'm saying now that I found that they treated me but I'm saying it as they treated me personally. I'm not speaking for anybody else. I've got no reasons as such to like 'em or to dislike 'em just because they're Germans. I'm not going out a my way to condemn the

03:00 whole race for the atrocities that were carried out by some. That's basically the way I am. Oh I wouldn't you know like turn anybody in. Oh don't get me wrong like that. It's just that you know like just to me they're just the, Christ the border was only a couple a kilometres away from where we lived. I mean just a line on a map is not gonna change one person to another and that's about all really that

03:30 I remember. I mean I don't think that the Germans were really out to make war on kids as such. So you know like it just live and let live type a thing.

You mentioned before that the situation became so war torn, I don't know if they were the words you used but you mentioned that your family decided that they'd have to leave

Mm.

Holland.

Mm.

Can you expand on that any more?

Mm. Well the thing was that my father being at

04:00 the bottom of the pecking order in the butchering business in Holland wouldn't have a chance really to kick off again financially. You know like and he just I think he had enough of it. He could open another shop or something but I think he was basically thinkin' of our future. I honestly think that and I'd like to think it like that. So they decided to go out of Holland. Give it away. He had friends that went

04:30 to America. People went to Canada. As a matter a fact one of my relatives married a Canadian soldier and she's livin' in Montreal if she's still alive. I haven't heard or seen her for (UNCLEAR) like that and you know like and quite a few Dutchmen made up their mind to leave Holland behind. Get it like let it go. My father had been overseas. So you know like for him to go overseas wasn't all that much of a great decision I suppose. So Australia just happened to come up first. So whatever

05:00 happened we were did all the medicals and paid our way. We weren't a five dollar emigrant I know that. We weren't all that flash after the war because you lose everything and I mean there's no use compensation and all that that you get now. You know like you had insurance I suppose. I don't really know. I mean we were only kids and in my days you were seen but not heard. You know like so you only picked up the bits you did, you couldn't miss out on. So the decision was made to go

05:30 to Australia. Nobody objected to it and I remember saying goodbye to all my friends and all that and at school and oh we couldn't wait to get to Rotterdam and to get onto the boat.

So what did your mother... what was your mother's impressions of leaving Holland?

I think in all honesty they left all their family and friends behind but I think again for the good of the family and the whole lot she went along and I don't think

06:00 in a way there were any regrets. They did miss it yes, naturally and I didn't expect anything else. My father would a been well in his forties by the time he came here. My mother was ten years younger and I don't think we ever wanted for anything in Holland or even in Australia. You know like, as I say, we came at a time there was plenty a work and all that and if you were willing to work the jobs were there. We did live in Woy Woy and most of us lived and worked in, ah we worked in Sydney.

06:30 My mother worked in Woy Woy for Osti clothing mob. I think they're still somewhere, not that they're down there because all that's been pulled down and you know like I think we lived pretty well. You know like there's been I can't honestly think of any regrets. My father and mother decided to go back to Holland for a holiday and I think that turned out to be a bit of a disaster because I think by those days they were Australians more than Dutch,

07:00 even at the age they did come here because they were intended to stay for about three months. My younger sister went with 'em and she only lasted about so many weeks and she couldn't hack it in Holland so she came back and my father and mother they liked it. They went to see all the families and

in hindsight when you sit down and think about it they made new friends, the people they left behind in Holland. They didn't get on with his family all that much because one of the reasons we left there and

- 07:30 I think he went to see one of his brothers and I don't think that really turned out to be such a wonderful experience either. So you know like they stayed with my mother's side of the family more than they did with his side of the family and I think that like everything else, if you stay for too long you just outlive your welcome. No, I'm being quite honest about this. I mean they travelled around but I think that they remembered Holland in the old days and I don't think that the new Holland
- 08:00 greatly impressed them as much as it most probably should and I think they missed Australia. Different way of life, different circumstances and all that and I don't think they stayed there the full three months either. They just came back and just lived on their lives on and when my father passed away my mother just you know like, well she could have gone back to Holland if she'd wanted to but oh no, she stayed 'til she passed
- 08:30 away and incidentally in both instances I was in when my father passed away I was in the North of Queensland on an army exercise and they had to fly me back for the funerals and the undertakers were on bloody strike and that wasn't a very pleasant experience but he just passed away. He wasn't feeling too well. He sat on the bottom of the stairs of where he lived and massive coronary and gone and my mother was found sitting watching the TV in virtually exactly the same way and I was in the Kimberleys
- 09:00 and I couldn't get home for the funeral for her because it would have taken me a week to get out of there. So I was over the radio, police radio and that they wanted to know. They informed me and they wanted to know what I was to do because I was the oldest in the family and all that. I said, "For God's sake don't hold back the funeral or anything." You know I said, "Just," so they got back on the radio again the following day to make sure that I had made up my mind and all that and I'd it hit me like a cold
- 09:30 bucket of water because she's pretty fit as a fiddle. She wasn't crook or anything. I thought when I got onto the road the police net that were searching for me that my daughter was lookin' after, I was on the farm then. You know I thought the bull had got out and you know what I mean or something like that had it was something there but when it was my mother it came as quite a surprise but I just couldn't make it couldn't get out of there. Yeah, but they really loved Australia. They really
- 10:00 made it home. My father always had problems with his with the language you know like and my mother learned to speak English and a hell of a lot easier and a lot quicker in some way but they managed. You know like they never regretted it really.

So before you left for Australia what did you know about it?

Well I think we could I think even in those days I could see the writing on the wall. A lot of people, not all that many opportunities.

- 10:30 The yeah, how can I put it? You know like it's a hard question to answer really of the age I was. Schooled in you know like I mean life had gone too fast, too wild so to speak. You know what I mean and to settle in and get back to the typical sedate Dutch way of life,
- 11:00 I although I wouldn't know the difference 'til you grew older fair enough but I mean I don't know when my parents made up their mind to go overseas it couldn't happen quick enough. You know like new experience. It's always greener on the other side of the hill type of thing and no matter where we would have gone I'm glad we never went to South Africa. I'm glad we never went to America. I don't know enough about Canada whether we would have made any difference. I reckon the Canadians I have met over the years and still know I think we would have managed
- 11:30 there quite alright. I think their attitudes are very much as the Australian attitude. The East Indies, Caraso and places like that honestly don't know. The coming to Australia fair enough was a whole new experience. The whole boat load was all Dutch people and my parents made some friends with them moved on to Woy Woy as well and all that and they remained friends virtually you know like 'til they all snuffed it
- 12:00 and you know some did alright. Some did better than others but everybody did okay. I can't think of any bad cases that really didn't make a good start in Australia. My brother did alright. My sister went back to school. My brother went back to school for a little while because he was young enough. Oh Jesus he's what five, six years younger than I am. So she went back to school to keep going and
- 12:30 I found one thing is that if you were willing to work in those days and I'm talking the earlier we came here in 1952. If you were willing to work in Australia, no matter what you wanted to put your hands to the opportunities were there and I took every opportunity. The trouble was I took too many opportunities. If I was working in one place and the bloke next door was offering more money, whether I could do the job or not was totally immaterial. I've had some really I've been salesman, storeman,
- 13:00 store manager, despatch clerk, ice man, signaller on the railways, fireman on the railway, salesman again. You know I just wandered from job to job, as I say, yeah, tradesman, carpenter didn't last long there and even in one place I managed a complete store complex 'til they changed staff and one of the blokes workin' for me got sacked
- 13:30 without telling me. So I just handed in my resignation right on the spot there too. I don't go for that sort

a stuff. I didn't like it there in the first place. It was a good job and it paid well and you know like I just got the wanderlust. It was just too much, too easy to make a quid. Never short of a quid and I wanted to settle down and hence I finished up joining the military and I've never looked back from those day onwards there either. Really,

- 14:00 really enjoyed it. Made a good career out of it and when I left the army I became a farmer. I wouldn't make a farmer's backside but that's beside the point. I finished up teaching it and all sorts a stuff because when I made up my mind to do something I tried to find out all there is to know about it and I've always done that. When I go on army exercise or anywhere with the army I always tried to find out what's in the district. What plants, what minerals, what the towns are like. 'Cause I've always been a bit of a rock hound and
- 14:30 you know like oh some a the stuff I found in the bush. I found an old reef opal once up in North Queensland and even people are willing to pay me for the trips to go back there for God, love nor money. When I had the chance I went to every archive on that exercise, every map and I can't find it again. I've got pieces of it here but I mean you know like you're just moving through. You know like that's the sort a thing because it just it I turned whenever I had a chance my whole career into a hobby that paid. You know like I mean let's face
- 15:00 it I'm not a charity worker and yeah, I think that in hindsight I learned a hell of a lot with all the jobs I had in the bush. I worked with a team they went around all the silos repairing silos and the machinery that was in there. So when the wheat season started I had a job as an engine driver. Well you had to run the engine, you had to run all the machinery and all that and then somebody was paying so many dollars for so many bags that
- 15:30 you had to sew up by hand and oh God the first few days the skin just comes off your hand. That was pretty hard game and then the trucks had to be loaded with the bags of wheat. So being tall made it slightly easier because they had a gadget on the side of a truck where you put on a bag a wheat and it lifted it up onto the truck and then it used to drop onto your shoulders and it had to be stacked. Now if you were a little short bloke you know like that bag a wheat used to drop and they were big fifty bushels bags. I'm not talkin' about little
- 16:00 bags. They were heavy bags, even the first bags a the season. Big sturdy bloke like me I used to staggerin' over the truck 'til you get used to that and then when that season on the place where you worked started to finish then you could get a job in the silos where you actually then could cut the bags open and they go onto a lift up into the silos and I did that for quite awhile. That's where you learn what Australia's all about, what the bush is all alike. I remember drinking water
- 16:30 out a dams you know like a dead sheep on one side and you drinkin' brown water on the other side and glad to get it. You know like I mean Australia was not quite what it is now. I remember going to Ayers Rock when it was all a dirt road. Now it's just air conditioned highway and everything laid on. I've been back since and it in a way it was a big disappointment to me because it was no longer really what I remember it to be. I enjoyed Australia on each and every aspect. Made
- 17:00 friends easy, learnt to speak English easy. Well I met my wife. You know like their family they have people they knew up at Toukley and we used to go prawning there and I bought my first car was a mini minor. That was a car that just a little two seater. I never had a licence because I came out a the bush and there you just if you wanted to drive a truck so long you could reach the pedals you just drove. So when I came back
- 17:30 we bought this car and you know like I was teaching my wife and her mother to drive and they decided to go for a licence and they talked me into going for a licence. So anyway cock sure of myself I went and I failed. They passed. You know what I mean not a problem. You know what I mean. I went on every question they asked. I remember this they had this drawing there and they had a cross road and this bloke that did the test, I think it was a policeman at the time, said, "You're
- 18:00 parked there." No he said, "You're there and there's a car on the other side. Who got the right a way?" I said, "The first one across." You know what I mean not a problem to me. You know what I mean. Why sit there and argue the toss. You know like so anyway he said, "You," I said, "I don't think you're too keen on the questions." So anyway they failed me. That was in Hornsby. So I got on the train because I was on the railway then I think and I went to Gosford and I read up all the rules. So booked myself in for the driving test there and I passed
- 18:30 it. See I couldn't quite work out, I was brought up on the metric system you know like and to me a foot's a foot and you're got it hangin' from the end a your leg and you know when it comes to distances that bit of a problem there but anyway I managed to pass that and I was a licensed driver then. So we used to drive from Hornsby occasionally to Toukley to go prawning and it used to take us all day because it was only a little two seater and there was no really good highways down there
- 19:00 and there is when you really get to know what Australia and the way of Australian life's like. Coming back from there you had to climb the Hawkesbury River hills and that used to take, in a little car like that, hours and hours and the streams a traffic behind you were absolutely unbelievable even in those days. So we went up one holiday time and it had a dickey seat in the back and I had Gil's sister in the back and a suitcase strapped to the front and the car was no bigger from here

- 19:30 to there. One of those little bloody machines. The gear stick had broken off and it the wheel brace just fitted over the little stump and that was the gear stick and also it was the best safety I ever had on it because whenever you went shopping or something you just took the wheel brace with you. Nobody could shift the car and if you ever run into something and all that you just came home, got a different colour can a paint and just took ya half an hour to paint the whole car a different colour. So my wife decided to get the car checked out from
- 20:00 in Toukley to go back to Hornsby on this Sunday and she's away for hours and hours and hours and she finally came back and I wasn't in a very good mood and I said, "What the bloody hell took you so long?" She said, "Oh we went to the garage and," you know, "It took the woman there so long to check the oil and she tried to get the oil topper up through the filler stick hole." You know the little hole through there? She said, "She first of all she couldn't find a funnel small enough," and it took 'em hours to get this
- 20:30 oil in. They didn't know where the cap was to fill the bloody car. So they're you know like you most probably get into trouble for saying that but I mean couple a women together you know what I mean trying to do that in those days. They, yeah, mm. So when

So just coming just on that thing of all these discrepancies between Australia just all these details about Australian life, like when you mentioned to Michael [interviewer] earlier that you really wanted...

Mm.

...to be an Australian.

- 21:00 Mm.

Why was that so important to you do you think?

Well being a Dutchman you're normally classed as being a rather a stoic sort of a humourless, arrogant bloody Dutchman. You know like and honestly I by that time I'd made up my mind to make Australia my home or so the quickest way to learn is to get in amongst 'em. You learn to speak the language. You learn the way of life and in cities and all that you only

- 21:30 learn one aspect of it. I wanted to see what Australia was really was all about. So I did quite a few jobs out in the scrub and there is where you really learn to be Australian. Sometimes people try to take the mickey out of you. Well fair enough. I remember there was an old bloke down there I was working with in one of the silos and I didn't know the difference between pushing and pulling. You know what I mean. I didn't know what it meant in Australia. So they tried to explain that to me you know what I mean and
- 22:00 even now, I know the difference now but I mean it took a lot a words that are Australian. I never knew what sheilas were. I never knew what bodgies were and you know like when we first came to Australia, this is something I even today don't understand. We landed in Fremantle and there we saw all this beautiful fruit in the windows. We had Australian money, like we exchanged on the boat and all that, and there you could buy apples for so many , "d."
- 22:30 I think the price was and all we had was pennies. I didn't know where the bloody , "d." came into it and my father didn't know either you know because that was in the old pounds, shillings and pence you know like it was the symbols they had for the money. We couldn't quite understand that. So it definitely had to be a strange country and when we did see Perth and Fremantle and we did land in Melbourne and when we landed in Sydney, when we saw really what Sydney was like even in those days the impression that we had at first that it was a little bit
- 23:00 more than a few cities along the coast you know and kangaroos hoppin' from bloody street to street and you know like if you wanted a cup a tea you'd just boil a billy on the side a the road type a thing. That was we were told and you know like the first impression was absolutely fantastic. You know like my father liked it. I mean it was strange, okay but you know like no use sittin' there and moaning about it. The, yeah it was quite an education mainly because we couldn't work out the money because there you know
- 23:30 like you knew what a penny was and all. We thought a penny started with a 'p' and then when you see the prices displayed with a , "d." we just wondered you know like whether they had some hidden source of money that you know what I mean we didn't know about.

You said that it was a really good impression first up

Well

What was it?

It was a strange impression alright but the I liked the people, I liked the country. I you know like so I travelled around the bush and there was some pretty hard times there. I worked in shearing sheds and all that and

- 24:00 Jesus, I remember one incident I worked for this bloke, I'd better not mention his name he might still be alive. He had a great big sheep and wheat station and I was I got the job in Sydney and I got there and I started workin' for him like full time and he was one a the first ones that put in a sheep dip. A great big

tip, like a great big round tank that you had to start the tractor up and it'd run pumps and it pumped it out a the old sheep dip where they used to go in and you had put a stick on top of 'em you know like

- 24:30 and half drown the buggers and all that but this was done in a great big rotating thing. A brand new concept and he had the whole district down there on this great big field day and the tractor they had was one a those things you had to wind up from the front first and then you took the starting handle out and that was clamped on the side a the engine. I'll never forget this and here was this whole circus down there where it was gonna be demonstrated how to dip sheep the modern way and as true as I'm sitting here Charlie that morning, that
- 25:00 was his name, started up the tractor but he didn't clip the starting handle in tight enough so right in the middle a the demonstration the starting handle got loose and it went straight through the radiator of the tractor and the whole bloody thing came to an end. I remember Charlie takin' off his hat, did the light fantastic on it. Got a shot gun out and he was gonna blast that bloody Dutchman off the face of the earth. You know like I mean I said one a the biggest shemozzles [mess] out you could a seen and I could see the bloody I could see the joke in this. So
- 25:30 anyway to cut a long story short he must a been quiet down by his neighbours and anyway for weeks and weeks and weeks every night after work he took that bloody radiator and repaired it. He soldered each and every bloody hole up. Hours and hours and hours. He had more money you could poke a stick at. He had two tractors. He wasn't a poor bloke but he was I think he still had the first penny he's ever earnt and he was as tight as whatever you want to adjective
- 26:00 to and he repaired it that particular thing. He wasn't really all that well liked in the district for that type a behaviour and anyway seeing the wheat season then came pretty close he couldn't very well sack me because he couldn't get somebody else quick enough. So anyway to cut a long story short I finished the season down there and when the season was finished I quit working for him and it was years and years later when we were living in Ingleburn,
- 26:30 we had our own house down there, and three doors up there was a bloke that was a travelling salesman in the bush and we were talking one day and exactly what I'm saying to you now about that incident on the thing and he said, "Christ all bloody mighty." Exactly I can still see him sittin' there. He said, "I thought I'd recognised the face but I wasn't too sure." He was at that demonstration. He said, "Talk about a small world." He said you know I said, "We're still talking about that." Not about the thing but Charlie being so tight
- 27:00 you know what I mean that he could a bought a brand spankin' new radiator rather than repairing it. You know like yeah, it just shows you how really small the world really is because you know like it just came up in the conversation and he couldn't lie about it because it just was a one off but that was one a the early introductions of you know like how Australians can be like but I found mateship in the bush something really astonishing. If you were accepted by the people you know what I mean. I got two teeth
- 27:30 missing. I walked into a pub in West Wyalong and they had a bet going the first one to walk through that door was going to cop a can a beer and it happened to be me. So I walked through the pub of the door and the next thing I got a full can a beer hangin' out a my mouth. Broke a couple a teeth off and anyway I was pretty big bloke and there were a few bar chairs down there. So a bit of a storm created from there and the cops picked us up and you know like just booked the lot of us disturbing the peace and what have you you know. The whole bloody lot and I thought
- 28:00 it was bloody wonderful and I said, "What a way to be an Australian," you know, "walk through a pub and all you do is bloody wear a bloody full can a beer because somebody's having a bet," you know what I mean to wear the first can. You know like but I mean I got over it.

So in those all those jobs that you had when you first came to Australia

Mm.

And you've said that you've done so many things.

Mm.

Did you encounter any racism or kind of negative attitudes or were they only positive ones?

- 28:30 Oh well some jobs were better I didn't like being a salesman but there was when I was being an ice man you know like when you deliver ice and when people change to refrigerators you knew exactly where there wasn't a refrigerator. So you had immediately an in to talk to those people to see if they wanted to buy a refrigerator. So the team I was working with you know what I mean they travelled around Woy Woy and we were selling fridges left, right and centre. Holstrom's Refrigerators. I even went to the factory to see how they actually
- 29:00 were makin' 'em. As a matter of fact I even worked there for a couple a weeks. Then they started to travel with the same system around Sydney and all that. You know like the suburbs and all that and honestly I didn't like some of the tactics of selling things. You're talking people into something and half the time they just couldn't afford it or they didn't want it and you know like and that developed into such a way that all you had to do was more or less get an introduction
- 29:30 and if the you were interested you made an excuse and then a hard pressure team'd move in and I

didn't like it. I honestly didn't. I mean I don't like being hated. There was nothing wrong with the refrigerators but I don't like that sort a work. So I didn't last long as a salesman as such. In the supply and store business I worked in a few places where you're a despatch clerk. You know like I worked for Laycock, Son and Addleton up in Sydney. They closed down years

30:00 ago and I was there as despatch clerk. I was there as a salesman and you know but that was selling inside. The people came there and I didn't mind it but not really my thing. You know like and I really didn't know whether I was gonna enjoy joining the army, navy and air force either for that matter. That's why I only signed up originally for three years. I thought, "If I'm gonna get in a situation I don't like then at least it's only three years rather than six," and in hindsight, I didn't know at the time

30:30 but in the navy you would have had to sign up for twelve years. So even if they would have accepted me I think I would have hesitated at that one. I knew nothing about air force but it was only just that at the time you know what I mean seeing that they didn't want me because I was a wog you know like I thought, "Well bugger youse." You know like, "I'll go next door." I was determined once I committed myself that to either one or the other to see it through. Yeah, I

Jack, when you came to Australia it was Australia had just come out of the war as well.

Mm.

Can you remember

31:00 **any effects that the war had had on Australia?**

Yes and no. I remember with the team I worked with at the with the silos there was one Dutchman that worked with us on the same team. That's right and he was a re an ex-soldier in the Second World War in the Dutch army. Can't think of his name and just because he was a returned serviceman

31:30 oh he got the job straight away. Whether he could do the job or not was all totally immaterial. Ex-service and that was it you know what I mean. The whether he was an Australian or not it made any diff he was part a the system and there was actually the basis that if you were an ex-serviceman or a returned service and all that, oh God Jesus you know like the you were it in Australia. No holds barred whether you you know whether you're on the right side or not was totally immaterial. Another thing that I noticed that there were some pretty ill feelings

32:00 too because I remember in Hornsby depot we had a couple of Second World War infantry blokes. One of 'em was one of the Rats of Tobruk. Bloody old bloke too. You know like and a real nice bloke. As a matter of fact I run into him here in Berry. He was living here and I only found that out a few years ago. He's dead now too and there was one bloke, he was a German, that worked for the railway and he had his number tattoo on the inside of his arm. So he reckons he was a bloody Nazi and all that and quite at lunch time and all

32:30 that when those two got together it wasn't all that very nice you know what I mean and when you look at it from the point a view he just was an outsider. Mainly because it was a pretty arrogant sort of a bloke. He wasn't a very well likeable personality whether he was a black, green or brindle wouldn't a made any difference. He still wouldn't a been very well liked but just because he was a German and he had a number tattoo on the inside of his arm he didn't go over too well with some a the ex-soldiers

33:00 of the thing but one of the blokes cleaning out the steam engines. Like when you finish on a steam engine job it goes over a pit and they rake out the ashes and the fires and there was a special crew doing that and the bloke doing it there was a German and he was a fantastic bloke. He was only short but talk about Arnold Schwarzenegger for muscles. He'd would have left Arnold for dead and shovelling coal all the time you know what I mean. He was really a nice bloke and he was really well liked. So it wasn't just because he was a German. I think it was

33:30 the tattoo number that might have had something to do with it and Italians weren't very well liked because yeah, when you look at it from that point of view I remember we had an Italian starting in the depot down there and whenever he had lunch you know like those blokes who were next to him sayin', "Here." They'd chuck him a kitchen knife or something, "Try it with one a your natural weapons," you know what I mean. They're oh yeah, oh honestly in the early days if you were on the wrong side of the fence and you were a new Australian so to speak you yes, you

34:00 copped it. You know like and if you took it they only hit ya all the more. You know like I was just, "Bloody Dutchman," and, "Clog wog," you name it. You know like and those things don't greatly worry me and if it did I never took it as any malice. I just mix with people. I mean you're on a crew of the fire plate of a steam engine you know and the only people there are the driver and the fireman and in some cases you got the guard as well. It all depends whether he fell in the water or not. The, I don't know whether I ought to talk about that

34:30 but you know like the days on the foot plate being a Dutchman and all that made very, very little difference. You normally teamed up with a driver and you became a team. So you shared all the shift works together. You shared, well if you finished up in Newcastle or somewhere you spent the night there in the railway institute and then you'd just wait for the next shift to take a train back, whether it's goods trains or passenger trains whatever like that and if you either were part of a team you're either part of a team. I've worked with some proper mongrels

35:00 that put a chalk line in the middle a the cabin. "That's your side and that's my side." Oh yeah the old school you know like

What, as a racist act or just...

No. They would do that to any...

Territorial?

To anybody you know like you could say it's you know like now you most probably get big compensation pay out. I said, "Oh you have to be a racist," but it was just because he was a driver and you were a bloody fireman but most of 'em, I've driven trains when I was a fireman. You know we used to share the jobs. I mean there's nothing to driving a train. The bloody

35:30 things drive themselves. Jeez I could write books about that too. The you know it's just how you take life. I get on with people. They get on with me and if I don't like 'em they'll soon know it and if the other way around well then get somebody else. Don't lose sleep over it. Life's too short you know like and I've found that it's never gone against me. That's in the bush. You're there on your own. Okay, so you're on your own. You either make it you don't. I've never been a great drinker. Beer has never been a thing that

36:00 did much for me or on the grog. So to go down the pub all the time was a great Australian pastime. Oh, I've had a few drinks and been under the weather a few times but I've never been never even in the army it's never been a thing that really you know like became a big Australian issue. It never did but I've never condemned anybody for drinkin' either. I mean if that's what they want to do, then drink it. I could never understand the Australian way of

36:30 expressing swear words. The word 'bloody' to me means nothing and when you can swear in front of men but not in front of women I couldn't quite understand, even today I still can't quite fathom that attitude. If you want to swear, swear. If you don't, don't but 'bloody' to me means nothing. The word 'bastard' in Holland means, if you want brown sugar in Holland you go to the shop and ask for a kilo of bastard sugar. That's the name of it. You know like so I could never associate the word 'bastard'

37:00 with being a bad part of the language and I don't know whether I ought to really go into this but I remember when we lived in Woy Woy, Woy Woy, ocean, beach swimming, surf you know. Like I spent a hell of a lot of my time down there and right on the beach was a milk bar and that milk bar was owned by Dutch people and they were on the same boat as we came over with and they had two, three lovely daughters about all my age and all that

37:30 and they were quite nice lookin' kids too. So we go swimming and you know like you go to the milk bar and it was always somebody's turn to go and buy a bottle of soft drink or whatever. You know what I mean and this most probably will get edited out, it was my turn to go to the milk bar to get a shilling's worth a licker arse and that's exactly how they explained it to me. What it was, those

38:00 black straps of black lookin' shit, licker arse. So Jackie boy's walked into the shop down there and I asked the little girl down there for a shilling's worth a licker arse and she went all colours and she said, "Oh," you know like she wasn't greatly app, "Yeah the black shit over there," and then I saw the whole bloody team standing outside the window laughing their bloody heads off you know what I mean. I knew immediately that Jackie boy got had. You know like learnin' to speak the English. So anyway I got my own back.

38:30 A German girl moved into the district and one of the blokes that was in that bloody team got very keen on her and did I speak German? "Oh yes," you know I so I taught him a few words in German. So I remember going Saturday night the picture going to the pictures was the big thing you know like. So we went to the picture and this bloke's there with this girl and the picture and startin' along. He got his face slapped and oh God Jesus did it start a shemozzle. I don't know what he could a told her but it couldn't a been all that very

39:00 nice. So I got me own back but that's how you learned to speak English and this is really how you got to learn the way of life in Australia. You know like you been had, okay. Get it back but don't make an issue out of it. The minute you do you just got more of it. No I really got no regrets on that whatsoever. Enjoyed every minute of it. At least you were accepted and that you know. We travelled from Woy Woy to Sydney to go to work. Always the same train.

39:30 Always the same team and we had a great big card school going. Play five hundreds you know so the losing team for the whole week used to buy a lottery ticket. Not that we ever won anything but I mean that was you know like just a whole way of life. It was just go to the beach, grow up in summer time. Woy Woy and you know like it was great big holiday place. People come up from everywhere. You know like and you just that was in the days of the bodgies and widgies or whatever they had

40:00 to name 'em you know like and I had a motor bike in those days too. So I was even one a the motor bikies.

I might ask you some more questions about that 'cause we're at the end of this tape.

Tape 4

00:43 **Are you feeling do you want a drink?**

Oh moments a madness.

Indeed. Now Jack I'm interested in any recollections you have about the '50s in

Well

Australia.

Be in the '50s, being a new

01:00 Australian that's exactly what you were, a new Australian. If you tried to mix in with the people, speak English or try to speak English they go out a their way and help you. In all honesty when I first met my wife I was a Dutchman and I don't know whether they were or weren't greatly impressed that she had to choose a Dutchman or anything like that. I don't think they ever regretted it but I think the feeling was always there I wasn't an Australian and I wasn't a Brit but on

01:30 the same token if you wanted to be part a the people they accepted you as such and I found that it in the bush even more so. If you in any situation I came into the bush a lot of 'em never even heard or seen a Dutchman. If you tried, if you wanted to be part of their culture, call it what you like, they did everything possible to help you out. The minute you start jibberin' in your own language if the occasion ever arose that was a definite no-no and I never

02:00 did. I never wouldn't want to do it but that was one a the things that gave an hell of a lot of new Australians so to speak a bad name. The Dutch basically were pretty well educated in English. In Holland to speak English is not all so much of an achievement. The war stopped it for a few years because it couldn't be taught at school but prior to that it English was a subject at school was quite you could either learn German, French or English. My brother took

02:30 English after the war and I took by that time French. Nobody during the war would take German. They tried to force it as another language but if you had the choice you just didn't. Even today I think English is just a second nature in Holland now. So the words the capacity to learn to speak English for a Dutchman I think is a lot easier than for a German for argument's sake or anything else. I think it honestly is because a lot a words are the same.

03:00 I think the standard of education in Holland is pretty high too. That if you want to get the message across somehow you can do so. I found sometimes you had difference with the words, as I said, like with pushing and pulling. You know the words are so close together. Some of the swear words and stuff like that but I mean they're not really the incidence. If you went into a shop and you wanted to buy something you could always make yourself understood being a Dutchman. The Italians weren't very well liked. The Greeks weren't

03:30 very well liked in those days mainly because they tend to stick together an hell of a lot and they look after themself and you know like, well the Italians were enemies at one stage a the game during the Second World War. The Germans that came I remember when I first joined the army we had a German in the same platoon. That was in 1957 and all that long Wally Ratchler or whatever his name was and quite often he'd come up. He'd say, "Oh Jack, what are ya gonna have a go at your German mate," you know what I mean that's try to stir problems. Never

04:00 it never occurred to him or to me to even go out a your way to do that. I could see no reason for it. Once you're in uniform you're all part of a family. Whatever your different race or something like that never made any difference. To me in Australia it never made any difference. I never regarded anybody of any other colour, race or creed to be entirely different. I find people as I find 'em. I've found a hell of a lot a good Australians and I've found some proper backsides too and you know I mean that's to me is just the way it is.

04:30 I've met some good Dutchmen and I met some the one I wouldn't even you know drag out of a bog but I mean it's not because they're Dutch or anything else. You know just the way it is.

You...

Yes, I think being it was pretty tough in some places yes to be a non-Australian but it's only if you wanted to react to it, whether you took it to heart or not. Yeah, times are certainly changed. In the army I found it too. You were the butt of many jokes as the Irish

05:00 now. It was the Dutch or anybody else then. I mean you know most a the Irish jokes started off I think between the Dutch and the Flemish. I mean they're no different. They just put a different nationality to 'em. You know like so you know live and learn. You can always get your own back at some stage of the game.

What did Australians know about Holland?

Oh wooden shoes and tulips. Oh yeah, no problems at all. You know like and the windmills of course.

Yeah, I

- 05:30 think that in all honesty I think that the Dutch were pretty ignorant of Australia and I think in turn the Australians were pretty ignorant of Europe other than England. Even go to school you know like you learnt English history. I learnt the same history in Holland and the winning side was always slightly differently portrayed. You know what I mean and I still often wonder who won the battle at Waterloo and it all depends who wrote the bloody history books and I don't think that's ever changed
- 06:00 between the wars that the Dutch had with the English and the English had with the Dutch. If you read the Dutch history on it you know what I mean the Dutch were you know the vallant victors and if you read it the other way around it's a different story. You know what I mean but that that's normal. Even today history is being changed every time you read the newspapers but that's besides the point. The thing is that yeah, I think overall ignorance was pretty, yeah, pretty rife really. In some cases being a Dutchman you were quite a novelty actually,
- 06:30 see, and here is another thing you know like, "Oh," you know what I said, "Did you ever met the bloke who stuck the finger in his dyke?" You know like that was the only story that people most probably knew about the Dutch culture. I don't even knew the story in Holland where the bloke sittin' with his finger in the dyke and when you sit down and think about it when you know a dyke, you know like to stick a finger in a dyke to stop the fl... the North Sea from comin' in I don't think it would a been a very effective sort of an exercise. What did happen was
- 07:00 the dyke started to leak and this kid pointed it out and they did something about it in the dim dark ages and of course the story got embroiled but you didn't even learn that at school. I had to learn that in Australia about the kid with the finger in the dyke and I remember somebody asking me in an audience you know like they said, "Oh," you know, "The dykes of Holland and the dykes of this is there any dykes in Australia?" I said, "Yes." I said, "There's one in every back yard in suburbia," because the toilets used to be called a dyke. You know like you know like so well you got 'em here.
- 07:30 I was getting a bit fed up with the dyke business you know.
- You mentioned that in Woy Woy there was it's quite a beachside suburb or beachside area. What kinds of swimming costumes and things like that would you see around at the beach?**
- On the beach?
- Mm.**
- Well my father used to go swimming on the beach with a collar and tie because that's how you grew up in Holland and wherever you went in Holland you had to wear a collar and tie. So whenever we took him to the beach he wore
- 08:00 a collar and tie and then I remember everybody just wore you know like whatever was the fashion of the day and I remember the first girl appearing on Ocean Beach in a set of bikinis and the whole surf club and all the beach inspectors and the whole police force and you name it that girl had to be gotten rid of. It was totally absolutely indecent for somebody to be properly dressed in my opinion. There's nothing wrong with lookin' at a good sort in a pair a bikinis but I remember the first
- 08:30 bikini at Ocean Beach. I remember it well and all the fuss they made of it. God knows why. The Dutch unfortunately are pretty straight laced and they would a backed every move to the fullest. One thing I just recall when I was an ice man I travelled around a hell of a lot of people and there was as Dutch no, there was an English lady and it was family of my sister's husband in later years she started
- 09:00 up the new settlers' league in Woy Woy or one a the get the beginnings of it and I got wind a that and she asked me in conversation would I drop off some billy deuce, like some flyers to all my ice customers. You know like to say that they were gonna have a meeting and all that. I said, "Yeah, no problem whatsoever," you know like. So she got all this stuff printed whatever and I started to handin' it out and none a Dutchmen would turn up. Some snotty nosed little Dutch bloke was gonna bloody well have
- 09:30 anything to do with the Dutch settlers' league or new settlers' league you know like. Don't ask me why but that's the Dutch mentality. You know what I mean. If you're not of age or you know like they took it the wrong way but anyway it got off the ground alright. They had their meetings and all that and they set up a new settlers' league whatever it was worth and unfortunately or fortunately we lived right near the
- 10:00 Woy Woy railway station and the minister for immigration, call him what you like, at the time came to visit all the worthies in Woy Woy and all that and I remember him gettin' off the train and we bein' the closest one near the station he had morning tea at our place and all that and upset the Dutch community even more and more and more and I don't think me being naturalised in uniform had a great deal to do with it. So the circle of friends that my family had amongst the Dutch were rather limited. Oh they had a few but by
- 10:30 and large you know what I mean they that's why I even today I don't mix with Dutch people unless they act like Australians. If the minute they want to be Dutch well they can go back to Holland for all I care. You know like that's an attitude that over all the years I've never deviated from.

You mentioned earlier that your father was quite and your parents were quite religious and

would go to church

Mm.

Back in Holland.

Mm.

Did things change

11:00 **when you came to Australia?**

No. No. My father still carried on with the religion in Australia and they used to go to church in Woy Woy. My father was hard a hearing and he used to stand in the back a the church and some bloke saying mass and all this sort a business mentioned to my father to come in and he used to go around with the big stick with the money bag on the end of it and all that and you know whatever they do in Catholic church and he made a fool of me old man in right in the church

11:30 and you know like he was lookin' for another church at some stage a the game and all that but mainly he just couldn't understand what was going on. In hindsight he had to go and sit down you know what I mean but he always did it. It must a been some new bloke. Some Dutch priests that came to look after the Dutch community over the years they used to come you know like visit all the Dutch settlers and all that and you know to me it was just a bludging trip. You know like the only thing they ever talked about is how much money they could rake out of ya.

12:00 Yeah I make no bones about it. I've you know what I mean I reckon I had to work for a living. If they want a do it they can get their backside into gear the same way as everybody else. Some of 'em were quite nice but by that time I'd pretty well switched off religion as such. I didn't like to see me old man being made a fool of by some idiot that's standing there in front with all these fancy clothes on you know doin' whatever they had to do but I'm not against it, don't get me wrong. It's just that I don't see sense in it. My mother was never all that

12:30 religious but she always backed my old man that we went to the school, we went to church and you know like 'til we actually came to Australia and, well when you're out in the scrub and all that you wouldn't even know where a church was let alone go and visit one.

You mentioned that you after all for probably about ten years or so you were in and out of so many different types of jobs

Mm.

And then you eventually decided to join the army.

Mm.

What

13:00 **actually sort of I know that you did say that it was a sort of a three year it was a kind of consistent job and something that would help you**

Mm.

To settle down. How did the army actually offer that to you though? What

Well I was lookin' for a job well I had to sign a contract that I couldn't get out of. So the minute I start there, whether I liked it or not I would have to stick with it and I had a job in my pocket a contract to go to New Guinea for two years oversee or some bloody thing and I couldn't see me doing

13:30 the job. a), I don't think I was mature enough to do that type a work and honestly it didn't really appeal to me although by that time I had met my wife and going in the army had they said, "You'll be away for times," as well too and all that but I had to do something where I was gonna settle down and do something. I wouldn't start me own business. I frankly wouldn't know how. The only formal education I had was in Holland. I never had any formal education,

14:00 English or anything else, in Australia 'til I did join the army. So I thought, "Well," you know like I'd met soldiers and I knew I had the great big image of the Australian Anzac and you know what I mean. I did I do read a lot and you know like and I was well and truly taken in by the Australian way of life. The way they conduct themselves in the army. The way they looked after in this country being a returned serviceman, an ex-serviceman and all that and I thought, "Oh Jesus things can't be all that bad," you know what I mean and the people I worked

14:30 with, a hell of a lot of 'em were ex or returned soldiers and the mateship down there I well and truly you know like I just took to. So why it had to be the navy first, whether it was just because it was the first office in that complex or that the army had to be the last I don't really quite remember. Mainly aim was to settle in. I don't think I ever would have joined the navy because it would a been a twelve year contract and I don't think I would a been stupid enough

15:00 to sign that not knowing what the system was going to be like. The air force I didn't even get past the

opening and shutting mine it was only just on a spur of the moment and with the army I thought, "Oh well three years." You know like, "What can go wrong in three years?" and that's basically what made me join the army and I've never looked back really because I made corporal very quick and I made sergeant very quick. I've been up for commission a few times but I couldn't pass the psychology test. The

- 15:30 boss came up, that was just before Vietnam actually, the boss came into my office one day and he said, "Listen Jack," I said, "Look," he said, "You're doin' a," I was doin' an officer's job in my line a work for awhile anyway he said, "How 'bout applying for a commission?" I said, "You got to be jokin'," you know. He said, "No," he said, "we're serious." So I filled in all the necessary paper work, did my medicals and I had to go and see the chief a the taskforce and all that and he was an Holland survivor and all that and we're talkin' about old times. We had a ball
- 16:00 together, no problem there. The next thing what was left was the psychology test. You go to go and see the trick cyclist. So I'm in the middle getting a unit ready to go overseas and all that. You know I was flat out. Under staffed you know like (UNCLEAR) things goin'. The next thing call comes over the blower, "Get in your wagon Vandam. Turn up at wherever at the gate to an Ingleburn psych test." "Yeah, righto. Can I put it off?" "No way." So I had to turn up. So Jackie boy turns up,
- 16:30 I was a sergeant then, and a couple a blokes down there and there's a psychologist bloke who worked there standing in front and we had to fill in all this paper. They give ya a you know like round blocks and put in square holes and all this sort a stuff and there's the forms you had to fill in defy anybody's commonsense and the last form threw me. It really did. "In fifty words explain what you're good at and you're not so good at." So I made the mistake of asking that bloke. I said, "Look," I said, "This
- 17:00 form here, military or civilian?" "Oh well you're filling the form out," you know what I mean. So I put a line across it and I said, "If bullshit like this makes me an officer I prefer to retain my self respect and remain a senior non commissioned officer," and handed it in. I thought, "If crap like that makes you an officer I want no part of it." So after lunch, the army had just been issued we changed from khaki uniforms to green uniforms
- 17:30 and a lot a the khaki uniforms went through a dyeing process and like you know what dyeing is like? Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't and when I had to see the psychiatrist after lunch and I wasn't in a very good mood, he sits down there. His pockets were a different colour green, his epaulets were a different colour green. He just looked like a bloody golliwog you know what I mean. So I couldn't keep a straight face and he's reading the papers very efficiently and he said, "Oh," you know, "an attitude like that is not gonna
- 18:00 get you very far." I said, "Filling in crap like that," I said, "I don't think I wanna go any further." You know I said, "I really mean what I put down." I said, "Look," I said, "I honestly thought I was selected to become an officer because of my capacity to do the job." I said, "Not to play with bloody noughts and crosses and filling in garbage like that." I said, "Sorry about that." I said, "If that's the criteria shove it," you know what I mean. So, out. So needless to say a few days later the letter came from that mob into
- 18:30 the office and the boss called me in the office and he said, "Jesus Jack," you know. He said, "Why didn't you tell lies?" you know what I mean. He says, "It's only a piece of paper," and I said, "Yeah well I didn't." He said, "But anyway they've told you to reapply in six months' time or in nine months' time." I said, "Yeah alright." You know I couldn't be bothered. The thing was, I know I'm jumpin' the gun a little bit but it did come back. What happened was I had one subject
- 19:00 to qualify for to become a warrant office. You do law, the subjects, see, well you do in each level. You got to know military law and all that. You do your military training, which was normally subject known as subject A and then our corps you do that's split in parts where you've got to be in your trade. You know have the necessary qualifications to go up in the ranks and I had one subject to go to be fully qualified for warrant rank and that was pretty early in the piece too and I couldn't do the
- 19:30 course to do that but the other qualification was six months in a theatre a war in the field would qualify you for that particular subject and that's all I had to go. So we were in Vietnam and my six months were up and by that time the paper work had come through for me why I didn't reapply and all that and I had no intentions of becoming an officer. I didn't even know how to spell the bloody word, let alone become one. So I knocked it back but I did
- 20:00 become eligible for that particular subject. So by that time we I had a bit a friction with my boss at the time, all in good fun, and he nominated me and he said, "Well the brigadier wants to see you," you know, "to shake hands and all that." I said, "Yeah, alright," and when I saw the big white father he said to me he said, "Jesus," you know he said, "Why didn't you reapply to become an officer?" I said, "Well," you know I said, "I can't pass the psych test." I said, "To be quite honest," I said, "my attitude hasn't changed," you know what I mean.
- 20:30 He said, "Well," he said you know he said, "Well you most probably don't know this but every applicant in that particular thing all got knocked back for something." He said, "You just made it easy for 'em," you know by putting that bloody garbage on the paper and I said, "Yeah well," you know, "no way." He said, "Well," in the rear we had a great big field workshop and the bloke down there was in that same intake and he put in for it and he was going to be sent back to Australia to become to do the necessary course and he said, "Well," he said, "you're now fully promoted to

- 21:00 warrant rank." He said, "Do you want to take," he was a warrant officer, "Warrant Officer Holmes' place?" I said, "No way." You know I said, "Look boss," I said, "I raised the unit. I started the unit." I said, "I'd like to see my tour out with the unit," and he said, "Christ," he said you know he, "You bloody Dutchmen are all the same," you know. He said, "You've knocked back a commission, or a chance to go for a commission. You're knocking back promotion." I said, "Yeah," I said, "When I get back to Australia I'll get promoted." You know, "Same chances there," I said, "but I don't like to
- 21:30 do a job half way," you know. I said, "I'm happy," that was a front line job okay but Jesus, I was virtually runnin' on my own down there. The job I had was fantastic. I had the orphanage as a project. You know like I as much as you can enjoy anything you know what I mean. I just at home. Going into a base unit, holy bloody hell they were up in the sand up to here and any base unit the minute the army has been in a place for more than two days the bullshit starts and in the rear areas
- 22:00 it's rife you know what I mean. Not me. I enjoyed what I was doing down there and I wanted to stay there and I made no bones about that. So he said, "Oh well," he said, "There's two opportunities you knocked back," and he wished me all the best and, "Goodbye Jack," and I went back to me own lines. I was rather surprised that Brian did put me up to be fully qualified and all that because we had a few funs but I'll come into that when that time a the world comes to it but in hindsight I've never
- 22:30 regretted it. I've been up for it a few more times. The whole thing is I know my limitations. I was good in what I was doing but I wouldn't necessarily be promised to go back as an officer in my same line a work at least for twelve months. So why start something else I had no interest in just to wear a couple a pips and I know an hell of a lot of blokes that
- 23:00 came up through the ranks. Actually my boss came up through the ranks. He was a captain, like in Vietnam and he came he was up through the ranks and you know like I mean it's a different way of life for them because the eyes a the world are upon 'em you know. Everybody's watchin' 'em. Nobody wants to know 'em, in some corps more than others because you're only coming up through the garbage anyway, and I didn't want that sort a stuff and I've never regretted it. Actually it made
- 23:30 me leave the army partly because I was goin' I was slotted to become an instructor to teach those officers coming up through the ranks on the quarter command quartermaster commission system up in Canungra and by that time I was half heartedly trying to get out a the army anyway. So when I was told that I was gonna get posted as such I told them that I had you know twelve months to go terminal postings, Sydney postings. So I stayed in my job. I wasn't gonna I didn't want a involved with it.
- 24:00 So yeah, I found that learning the Australian way of life calling a quid a quid, treating everybody exactly the way they treat you yeah, I've learned that the hard way and I've stuck with it for the rest a my life and I'm still doing it now. I honestly believe if you're honest about it you, you know you're willing to get your finger out and you're willing to stand up and be counted you are in my book in Australia as I know the Australians in
- 24:30 the '50s. Things have slightly changed now but that's latter years. The whole world changes, attitudes change and people change but honestly I think it was really that the people that came to this country in those years are a different kettle a fish altogether. Attitudes entirely different than you know like, as I found it over the years I really looked up to the Australian returned and ex-servicemen because by that time I've heard a lot,
- 25:00 I've seen a lot, I've read a lot and I really took to their individuality lifestyle. You know like their officers and their bosses are as good as the rest of 'em. I've talked to millionaires that had the back pants hangin' out in the bush. They owned properties bigger than the whole of Holland and they're just having a beer with you in the pub you know what I mean type of thing and that's the sort a life that I really relate
- 25:30 to. I don't give a damn what they've got and what they haven't got and what they're likely to do. I find 'em as I find 'em and I'm not impressed by very little else and my whole army career was based on that pretty well too. I respected my superiors for what they were providing they could do the job and if they were just because they were in that job and they didn't shape up to it they soon knew about it and that never went against me, as I say, as I got promoted pretty quick
- 26:00 and I'm not the easiest man to get along with but if a job had to be done I get the job done and I never take it out on my men either. I mean I hold that reputation as well. I've been in the army twenty one years and I've never, ever, ever made out a charge sheet and I think that is a record. As a matter of fact I wouldn't even know how to do it but if somebody wanted to have a go yeah, I'll sort it out no problem and I can go anywhere on any reunion. No matter
- 26:30 where I go even after all those years and always welcome you know what I mean as mates and that is with the coloured people as well. My first platoon sergeant was a Thursday Islander and honestly of all people that I respect and really got a lot a time for is old Harry. He's pretty old now. I still see him every year and yeah, if you really want to talk about coincidence when I was in Vietnam my father was travelling from Woy Woy
- 27:00 to Homebush where he was working and he's sitting next to a soldier and of course, "My son's in the army," and we're talkin' away and he had to sit next to bloody Harry of all people and I know the world is only so bloody small and I saw Harry after many, many years about three or four years ago up at Toukley where we go every year on a Long Tan commemorations and the first thing after all those years

you know like it was quite an emotional come together and all the - I only go to a few reunions and Harry being an

- 27:30 institution and he's a Thursday Islander and I really, really got a lot a time for Harry. We both have. We one a my best mates but also at the same time we had another Aborigine and he was the one that went back to England to get that skull whatever out a the museum and he's one a the elders now in West Australia and in the army he was known as Darky Cobung. There was no malice in it or
- 28:00 anything like that and when I saw Harry he'd just come back from West Australia and I just don't know what make me say and I said, "Jesus Christ Harry," I said, "you didn't run into bloody Darky Cobung did you?" "Oh," he said, "Jesus Jack. "Oh," he said, "Jesus, oh don't mention that word." I thought, "Oh jeez I've put my foot in it here. I've been up in the discrimination board and racist and God knows that," you know and Harry said, "Oh no," he said, "when I ran into him," he said, "I've known him for that many years, I'm going back to the '50s for Christ sake. You know I said 'G'day Darky' and all that
- 28:30 and he really put the boot in you know what I mean," I said, "he is (UNCLEAR)," you know what I mean. I said, "Oh well," you know I said, "I would have run into him I would a called him Darky and all that." He said, "Oh," he said, "Jesus Jack those times have changed," and Harry is dark you know but in the army it makes no bloody difference. You're in uniform you're part of the family whether you're black, green, brindle or whatever. So we had a reunion a couple a years ago and there was old Nugget Coombes. Well the name Nugget you know what I mean.
- 29:00 He's coloured and I hadn't seen him for many, many years. He's there with his wife. She's Abor, part Aborigine or Aborigine or whatever. Don't greatly care. He walks over and I walked over and I said, "Listen before you say anything." I said, "What am I gonna call ya?" You know I didn't even know his first name unless we got name tags on. Nugget you know what he was known old Harry or Goddamn bloody Nugget and he said, "You call me anything else but Nugget you Dutch bum," you know what I mean he said, "I'll take it personally out a ya." I said, "Well
- 29:30 so long that's understood," you know what I mean and you know and that shows ya the difference of those days to days now. There was never any malice or any hardships in it. You know we had quite a few coloured, oh they're not quite don't want a upset any of 'em and use the word. I mean Darky was Darky Cobung and Nugget Coombes was Nugget. Harry was always Harry the platoon sergeant. We knew he just didn't have a nickname as such,
- 30:00 not because of any reason other that Harry suited him you know what I mean. Yeah and those things. You know like in hindsight it's pretty sad that now you've got to be so careful to you know like to be yourself really. You just can't you can't get away with it.

Had you had much exposure to Aboriginal people when you were working before you joined the army as well?

Yes. There were in some communities Aborigines were working and all that but I never really

- 30:30 worked close with 'em because most of 'em weren't working. You know like yes, I travelled through in Aboriginal communities before. I worked no, I worked through areas that are Aboriginal reserves but that was in my army days. That was just before I got out actually. I travelled through Arnhem Land and places like that before it was Kakadu and when with the last exercise on the ground,
- 31:00 Black Buffalo, I had to go with an anthropologist through oh Kakadu and Arnhem Land, H(UNCLEAR) and all those places to lay down a route for the helicopters in case anybody came down that we you know like we had stuff like that and I got on with 'em okay. Like I never had any trouble with 'em. The as a matter of fact I think I've got a photo here somewhere where I'm takin' off my shirt, which I gave to an Aboriginal elder and I swapped it for an original didgeridoo and a boomerang, not souvenir stuff. You know what I mean. That's all
- 31:30 I had with me that I could trade with those people. Yeah, the no I respect them for what they are, some, and I just you know like to me it's just part and parcel of the job. Part and parcel of Australia. For God's sake they are part and parcel of Australia. You know like they were we're only ring ins. Yeah I've done quite a bit a study up about it too because the Dutch were involved in West Australia with the Aborigines. It was a Vandam that
- 32:00 did all the legal work in Batavia on the Batavia survivors. I found that out when I was down there going through Germans museums. I haven't quite tied him up to the Vandam family yet and it's unlikely that he would be because I'm Catholics and the Dutch East Indies Company wouldn't have employed Catholics, see, because they're bottom a the line. Protestants above the line and Catholics below. So but I'm workin' on it but

Just as a slight diversion

- 32:30 **how did you and Gillian meet?**

How did I meet my wife?

Yeah.

Oh my God. Jesus, she's not gonna like this. I was the ice man, see, and whenever the holiday places down there needed bread, milk or ice they had a board down there. The estate agents used to put it in, "Ice," and then and I knew in every house where the ice boxes were. So if they wanted ice the estate agent told 'em you know like, "Put two bob," or whatever it was, "on top a the thing," and you know like I used to start at what two, three o'clock in the morning otherwise the

- 33:00 ice'd all melt you know. Like I'd just get on the back verandah and all that and deliver the ice and all that and anyway my wife was staying there with a few girlfriends. You know and to cut a long story short I made my presence known when I had my ice run finished and she hated my guts from the first moment onwards but anyway being a persistent butterfly I went to meet her. I found out that she lived in Hornsby and all that and I said, "Well once you get back home," I said, "I'll turn up one day and knock, knock, knock on the door," and I did
- 33:30 and she was most surprised and she was home there with her sister and I remember well that it was her job to cook tea and I gave her a hand and then her family turned up and of all the bloody hamburgers that I cooked there was one not quite cooked and her old man had to cop it. So he wasn't quite he was a typical Australian. So yeah that was my introduction to Australian and home life and from there on in the romance blossomed as they say and I never regretted you know
- 34:00 like you know meeting her and marrying her. It's been the best part of my bloody life to be really honest about that and even now you know she's just part a the system. She worked for the public service in the oh Crown Solicitor's and she worked for the navy. She worked for the arm, as a matter of fact we worked in the same unit for awhile, which I wasn't too keen on but that was after Vietnam. I needed to put a typist on and Gil had worked for you know the all the system and all that.
- 34:30 I said, "Why not," you know like, "Get your feet back on the ground and I can I'll start you off," and I'm not quite sure of the whole thing how it started off but she started off in a unit next to us up in Ingleburn and Vietnam was still going on and from the minute she started she just got the cold shoulder, wanted anything to do with her and when she said you know that she said, "Jesus," you know, "What a place to work," and she said one bloke said, "Bloody Vandam aren't ya?" She said
- 35:00 "Yeah." He said, "Your husband in Vietnam?" "Yeah." "What year, '66?" "Yeah." Oh you know what I mean they couldn't do enough. See there were two Vandams in the army. I got booked in Vietnam by a military policeman out a town out of places I shouldn't a been and this bloke is standing there doing the light fantastic and all that and he wanted to know my name. I was
- 35:30 I we never showed badges a rank in the field, that's the last thing you want a do and anyway this bloke started to get on my nerve a bit and I had a few beers and he said, "What's your name?" I said, "Vandam," and he started to get pretty upset over that and I couldn't work out why you know. I said, "Look mate," I said, "Just keep a civil tongue in your head." I said, "I do outrank ya," you know what I mean." I said, "You got a problem get it off your chest." So anyway I got charged alright. I was in charge of a whole truck load of blokes and that's a different thing altogether and anyway
- 36:00 when I got back to the lines I said to Brian, the boss, I said, "Oh," I said, "bloody screws," you know I said. Piece a paper turns up, "Full charged," you know what I mean, "In that he at," and all this bloody bullshit signed by Vandam and Brian said to me he said, "You explain that to me," and I said, "How the hell would I put myself on a charge?" you know what I mean because that was quite serious and then I realised no wonder that bloke was hesitated. He happened to be a Vandam and when Gil worked in the unit
- 36:30 he must have given a hell of a lot a those blokes down there a hard time. So when she came in there it was the wife of Vandam you know what I mean. They didn't want anything to do with her 'til they found out she was the wife a the other Vandam and oh God Jesus you know like things never looked back for each and every one of 'em but I

Can you tell me what the charge was for?

Well being in a place where I... see what happened was, this was after not so long I think after Long Tan and we never really had a chance to dig in properly.

- 37:00 Too bloody busy. So I had to get into town to get some bits and pieces and that's quite a long trip and I said to Brian I said, "Listen how 'bout if I start early," and I said, "And I take as many blokes as I can get and take a few hundred sand bags. We go up to the beach and we fill up all the bags with sand bags," because what we were gonna do, where we were sleeping we were gonna make a barrier of sand bags around it. See in those days anybody would a walked in and would a clobbered the hell out of us and after long Tan we realised how
- 37:30 close that could a been. Oh so we had part the fences but they were piss poor. So anyway I made sure that the driver I had was a non-drinker because I had my own wagon but we took the truck in. So we get to the back beach of Vung Tau and the minute we stopped down there kids came from everywhere and all give us a hand filling sand bags. So we had the trucks loaded in a matter a no time. You know like and then there was a great big bar
- 38:00 down there on the beach. So the blokes said, "Oh we'll have a few beers," you know. I said, "Yeah go for your life," you know I said, "But watch the time," I said, "We gotta get back." So the next bloody thing we got pretty groggy and all that and the driver had to pick up some stuff. So he went to do what he had

to do but the town was out a bounds. It was a Tet offensive or some bloody thing that you know put the town out a bounds. So we had to go through the town to get back to our lines. So we were a bit early. So the blokes said, "Oh," you know like

38:30 they wanted to buy some Chinese dolls or whatever it was and all that and have a few drinks and anyway I softened and I saw a few officers down there in town and I stopped the wagon and I said you know I said, "The ban's been lifted?" and a lot a times the communications weren't workin' all that well and they said, "Yeah oh yeah. Oh back to normal mate. No problem." I said, "Righto." I said to the driver, "Finish what you were doing," and said I said to the whole crew down there, "I'll give you an hour and I'm back at the flags." In Vung Tau there was a great big monument and it's

39:00 got all the flags from the nations there and that was the meeting point if you ever wanted to meet, flags at Vung Tau. Gave 'em a town and of course I've got the bum drum from the officers. The town was still out of bounds. So we had a few beers, walked out of a bar and that's where all the military police were you know what I mean and I got very nicely booked but the sad part of it was everybody got booked except two blokes. The minute they saw all the trouble in town they buzzed off and they went to one of our rear units where they were known and they spent the night there. When I talked

39:30 the screws letting us go, military policemen are known as screws, to get us at the flags the truck was there. We got onto the truck and you know the paper work caught up at a later moment. So Brian said to me before I got marched into the big white father to have the riot act read to me and all that he said to me he said, "Jesus Jack," he said, "I don't quite remember whether I gave you a direct order to stay out of town or not." I said, "Jesus Brian fancy telling me that." I said, "I can use

40:00 that when I face the bloody music," you know. "If you're gonna tell me whether I..." he didn't quite remember or you know I was given a direct order or not. I know what I'm like at bending the rules. I said, "Anyway Brian," I said, "Don't worry about it." You know I said, "It happened." I said you know I said, "Its one a those things." I said, "I did ask officers for the okay and they said the bans had been lifted." So anyway I had to face the music. I was the first one to be hit.

Do you want to pick it up on this next tape?

Yeah.

Right at the edge of this one so we'll continue

40:30 **to talk about**

Tape 5

00:42 And then later on when the whole hospital turned up

Just on that issue of looking after your men you mentioned that Vung Tau that there was a Tet offensive that was happening.

Mm.

What was and we will come back to this

Mm.

Later on later tapes

Mm.

But you were

01:00 **telling us the story about what happened.**

Well sometimes the town goes out of bounds but the messages we get from the rear and the front sometimes overlap and all that. So I thought that the town was, there was a hell of a lot a servicemen in the town. So I thought it had been lifted. So I let 'em just stay and get a few beers and all that and of course it wasn't officially done. So we got charged, the whole bloody lot of us got charged but by rank and seeing I was in charge I was the first one to go and

01:30 when I faced the music and all that I told 'em straight out. I said, "Look," I said, "that's what we were there for." I said, "I asked," you know, "to see if there was a communication problem and all that," and I said, "I gave my blokes an hour," and I said, "and I think that the whole shemozzle started with a mix up on our surnames." I don't know whether it did or didn't. I think it had something to do with it you know. I said, "Here a Vandam being charged by a Vandam." I said you know I said you know like, "I had a few beers." I said, "I think that's where the whole mix up started," and he said, "Oh

02:00 well that's fair enough." So I got dismissed. You know like charge wiped. Misunderstanding. Oh he was a bloody good boss. He was a fantastic bloke. He was hard, a real hard man but fair. One thing about him. You know one of the best at commanding officers I've ever had and he still turns up at reunions

and I'm still the bloody Dutchman and he remembers that incident well but the trouble was I had about a dozen or fifteen blokes on that truck and I had to be witness for each and every one of the bloody charges. So except for the two that had enough

- 02:30 sense not to get booked but they were also away without official leave 'til the following day. So he had to let each and every one of those blokes off the charges. So I got everybody off. So the two that you know like came late they got hit with fourteen and fourteen. That means fourteen days stop of a pay and fourteen days confined to barracks but it means in fact you know like you do a few dirty jobs and all that for a few hours or so.
- 03:00 So that wasn't a great big problem either because if the charge was unfair as far as we were concerned you just whipped the hat around and you just give 'em a few bucks and you know like and they'd be under our domain anyway for the rotten jobs they're gonna get. You pack with stones from point A to point B type a thing you know what I mean. It's bullshit anyway but if the blokes needed it you know what I mean you could either sink the boot in a bit harder or you could be light on 'em. I mean it depends on the circumstances and those blokes got off pretty light because I copped quite a few extra duties
- 03:30 for that little episode too because when it was all finished I can still remember the little boss sitting down there and he said, "All you blokes dismissed but you stay here," and oh received one of the best dressing downs I've ever had in my whole twenty one of army career. He couldn't officially charge me you know what I mean but anyway he under no circumstances told me where I got on and off. You know and fair enough I deserved it, each and every thing of it. What got me off was that a couple of
- 04:00 his officers got caught under the same situation you know what I mean and the he said, "How do I know?" and you know like and, "It involved this," and all that blah blah this and all that but that was the end of it. Then I walked out you know. Like a few days later you know I just turn up had a beer with him. That's what I like about the system. You don't bear grudges. You know like and but in hindsight it's little things like that happen you know. My driver didn't drink. You always make
- 04:30 sure that if you go, see we were on the front line and that mean anything but we were in a forward unit. That means that you were working during the day and at night time as well, which meant that whenever you had a chance to switch off I used to take blokes with me I had wherever I travelled I had to take bodyguards with me and I used to go through Father Williams the Catholic bloke as bodyguard because I had the time to do it. I used to travel around places well, besides him and me I don't think any Australian's ever been but that's beside the... we'll come to that... but that was
- 05:00 basically what it amounted to. Whenever I had the chance I used to take a few blokes with me. I do what I had to do, drop 'em off in a bar somewhere and they go and have a couple a beers and then bring 'em back. You know like our restrictions in grog was two cans per day perhaps. You know like I mean the first Australian beer that we got there was Black Swan that came from Malaya and we couldn't even get the local population to drink it, it was that bad. The
- 05:30 American beer was undrinkable. Johnny Walker Black was a dollar ten a bottle American money and we had in the mess had open slather. I mean if you wanted to get on the grog it was quite easily done but the diggers didn't have those facilities. They were on two cans per day perhaps. So whenever they wanted to ease off you know what I mean if we ever had a chance to take 'em into town you know like I mean just take 'em in on a rotation type a thing and you know like and get a few
- 06:00 drinks. Then in later months the canteen opened you know like and the grog was a little bit easier to get at but in early days it was a definite no-no. Like as much as you could control it but

Just, sorry

Mm.

Just not wanting to interrupt you

Mm.

But just coming back a little bit.

Mm.

I wouldn't mind just getting a picture of your first initial army experience so that we can understand that later experience in

06:30 **Vietnam. Just**

When I joined the army?

Yeah.

Well when I joined the army of course I was the bloody Dutchman and we trained, did our recruit training. I learnt to speak English even better than I did before in all aspects. Made a lot a good mates and I more or less fitted in. I feel that I did. I mean I adapted to the army life. I enjoyed it and I had no troubles down there 'til the day came that I was

- 07:00 they found out I was actually a dog British subject. So it was called in the office and the boss said to me, "Right," he said, "now you're got the option of an immediate discharge or to become naturalised," and I said, "Oh," I said, "I'll become naturalised." You know like to me it's only signing a bit a paper. That's what I thought. No such thing. I had to get myself to Gosford and in uniform and I got naturalised down there. When I came back I was a British subject,
- 07:30 an Australian citizen and I thought, "Jesus I like the army and I like this," and all that and I said, "Well," I said, "I want to change now from three years to six years." So I filled in the necessity because you had more chances in the army as a six year man than you had as a three year man because by the time you were fully trained and all that a couple of years had gone anyway and I thought that I could see really something, a good future in the army if you were willing to have a go you know. Your chances were there. It was up to yourself. So
- 08:00 I changed from special reserve overseas to the Australian regular army. Started to pay for my pension and I signed up for six years. Finished my recruit training and I finished up with the engineers up at Liverpool, Moorebank. The school of military engineering. Now the basic initial corps training so to speak to become a field
- 08:30 engineer takes place every so often. So in the waiting time 'til the course starts you you're there and you normally you know either become a cook's offsider or a runner or whatever and I finished up workin' with the RSM up there and my God those people were God in those days, and still are for that matter. You know what I mean and that was quite a thing and old Joe Lassiter's still an identity in the corps. The minute you're an engineer, "Oh you know," or you know the man's name
- 09:00 pops up everywhere. Big huge man. A fair and he when he gave a word a command you could hear him from Moorebank to Liverpool I think. You know like he had the fear of God in just about everyone and I was his offsider for awhile and then I found out that he actually parachuted into Holland on a shot down aircraft. You know like no, quite not that it made any difference that if he wanted something done and you did the wrong thing you still felt about it but we got on alright and then the school started.
- 09:30 So I qualified as a field engineer Class 3. That's when you learn about booby traps, explosives, road building, you name it. All the jobs the engineers do you get your grounding down there. Then the time came that I wanted to do a little bit more and every so often lists come around from schools and courses that are available for to further your career and one came up for the Indonesian language.
- 10:00 So I bunged my name down for that one. Had gone to school with kids that were in Indonesia and me old man had been in Indonesia and all that. I thought, "Well I can now speak English and I can speak Dutch. I said, "Why not add Indonesia to the list?" because you got extra money for that too. Put my name down and anyway I was called in the office when I asked you know what happening to the application the course and the officer in charge, the adjutant he said to me that a brilliant
- 10:30 colleague of his did the course and he had trouble passing it or he didn't pass it or something like that and quite frankly he didn't think that a mere private soldier could or had the brains to pass a course like that and that really got my back up and I said, "Well Sir," I said, "for your information I already speak the language." I said, "All I've got to do really it's a formality," you know what I mean I said, "and I can get the bounty for it," you know. Like I said, "It's really worthwhile doing." "Oh," he said you know what I mean, "it's too late now"
- 11:00 and all that. I said, "Yeah well two can play that game," and as I walked out of the office I happened to notice the list of all the schools and courses going. So I just got a piece of paper and applied for the first one that was on the list, irrespective of what it was. It could have been anything and it happened to be a quartermaster course in a different corps. So anyway I did the course. They accepted me and I changed corps. Passed the course. Fully qualified and the first thing they did is post me right back to the engineer unit in their light aid detachment.
- 11:30 **Now you mentioned this before**
Mm.
- How long into your army service was this did this happen?**
Oh God Jesus it would have been I joined up in February 1957. Three months' recruit training. Oh it would have been in the end of '57 I'd say. Early days. Could have been very early '50, no I think it would have been '57 still and I changed corps but in the same unit because
- 12:00 I was then posted to 1 field squadron. See they had the whole army was in those days on name changes like restructure and the same unit at one stage was 1 field squadron, then it became 1 Independent Field Squadron. Then it changed to 7 Field Squadron. 7 Independent Field Squadron. Then when I went to the corps change I was in
- 12:30 the same squadron but I had to put LAD behind it. 7 could have been first before 1. I've got it all written down and you were still in the same unit. You just wore a different hat badge and yeah, I served with all those. They were all field units and from there on in your grounding in an LAD I reckon in the corps I was with then is one of the best things that could happen to you because the light aid detachment,
- 13:00 your function is there to keep that particular unit goin' at all levels at a very limited space. If something

breaks down, no matter what it is, if something breaks down there was only five people in the whole light aid detachment. My job was to look after the spare parts, the tools, the equipments for everything to make that eventuate. Then you had either a vehicle mechanic, the bloke in charge was a an artificer vehicle mechanic, a warrant officer,

- 13:30 and we had a corporal vehicle mechanic and then if you had for argument's sake engineering equipment you had an engineer fitter. If you were in an infantry battalion LAD you had armourers there to look after the guns and stuff like that but at a very basic repair level but of course if something broke down those people were very highly qualified. If you could get the spare parts to do the next step of work so to speak it damn well got done
- 14:00 and it was my job that make sure that we got the spare parts and stuff like that and this was what happens in LAD. a) you had a very small group of people. They all knew one another, could all rely on one another and when the work was there everybody got their finger out and you did a good day's bloody work. The paper work was something as such, well the only crime in my book is getting caught. If a job came up that had to be a little bit more detailed if we could get the parts to do it we damn well do it and that was my grounding
- 14:30 and then you know like things in the reorganisation got upgrades. Then you I qualified down there for corporal in with the engineers. Like you put your name down for those courses and I finished all that. So I was technically a fully qualified corporal. Then when the time comes and the opportunities arise they the system looks at the people that are fully qualified and then you may or may not get promoted. Anyway a job came up,
- 15:00 I think it would a been at that time lancer barracks. They needed a corporal in my job on the staff. It was an armoured, well an armoured unit and I got promoted to corporal and I went up there and that was quite early in my career and I had no problems down there as such and from there when they more or less said, "Goodbye Jack," I finished up going to Sydney area workshop I think. I've got to look up the times but you
- 15:30 went to a different job. I remember when I was at Sydney area workshop it was to close down the Sydney area workshop. They all Victoria barracks wherever they could had to be vacated to make to build it back to the original Victoria barracks and we were, or the unit was in one area where the old stables used to be and all things like that and we had to get out a there. So I was to be posted. So I finished up down there helping out getting rid of it and this is
- 16:00 another interesting part really because the office that I occupied as my thing was so small I had a desk in there and the desk had to come out. So I went through the back wall with the corner of the desk and behind there was a whole store room chockablock full of stuff from the Boer War. There were horse shoes, horse nails, lancers like the spears and the foot parts of lancers, of wheel right tools, wheel right hubs of old cannons and stuff.
- 16:30 Stacks of it. Somebody you know like in the dim dark ages didn't want to have anything to do with it. They just put a wall in, it's no longer there and accidentally you know like I opened it up. So army audit came around because you know there was quite a lot of stuff in there. You know like and they wanted each and every horse nail counted and everything like, yeah like bloody hell. So you know like we donated everything to the museum before all that could take place and I finished up. Then they moved the mascot, that's right
- 17:00 and I was a mascot for a very, very short time but that was a base unit and all that and I didn't like this daily routine where you know like every morning at eight o'clock there's a cup a coffee and two minutes past eight you put the sugar in it and that's not me. So I didn't last too long down there. So the field units are always short a people because you go on exercises a fair bit and you know like. So no, hang on. I was still at Sydney area workshop, that's right and
- 17:30 1950 that would a it would a been '57, '58 that's right. I was down there and the army had a great big exercise up at Mackay, Nutcracker, and Jackie boy was posted to go from Sydney area workshop to go up to Nutcracker and catch up with one of the either, with another unit and I'd just come out a hospital with a varicose vein operation. I had about forty eight bloody stitches in both legs. They ripped my
- 18:00 varicose veins out. Overtraining and all that and I was still not a hundred per cent recovered. That's why I would a been posted a bit earlier but anyway Jackie boy had to go. So I went on me own by train up to Mackay. I get to Mackay station and one a the warrant officers that I knew in one a the LADs was there. "G'day Jack. How the bloody hell ya goin'?" you know what I mean and by that time my legs were up like that. They were pretty swollen up. So anyway, "Yeah
- 18:30 okay then." You know like and anyway I reported at the showground in Mackay where you had to report and anyway I said to the bloke down there I said, "Jesus," you know I said, "I think somebody ought to have a look at my legs," and anyway they I never went there. I stayed in the rear unit and you know like it got fixed up and all that and unbeknown to me, when you move in the army you move on bundles and bundles a paper. My wife was workin' in Victoria barracks and at the same time one a typists had
- 19:00 decided to leave her job without givin' any notice. So somebody's talking there in Victoria barracks' mess and something to the effect he said, "Oh bloody Vandam shot off with a the one typists," you know. "I didn't even know he had a typist wife," because my paperwork got lost up in Mackay and I was officially in the army away without official leave. The next thing they stopped all my payment to my

wife. They I was I never missed a day but a

- 19:30 paperwork muck up. Gil was working for army audit and one a the auditors there, like one a the office staff at the audit, Carl Leaver. I'll never forget him. He was a fantastic, he was Jewish, fantastic bloke. He wasn't very liked by the auditors because he was Jewish you know but he was a real nice bloke and Gil broke down of course you know what I mean and she said, "He can't be." I didn't know about this at the time. She said, "He can't be away without leave." She said, "Here's the mail." In those days we used to only put a cent
- 20:00 envelope on the thing and it had a military stamp on it. I even got accused of stealing the mail stamp and anyway Carl took it up and all that and he went to see the big guns and all that and all that and then I found out that somebody had lost my bloody papers. So the next thing they, I became a bit of an embarrassment down there so the people in charge down there I yeah I was a corporal that's right. He said to me, "Righto, pack your bloody," no, I was a
- 20:30 craftsman that's right. "Pack your gear and you're flying into Collinsville." I said, "Alright I'm flying into Collinsville." So they had a chartered aircraft and we had to first of all push it out of a hangar down there and I think Adam and Eve had their initials carved in the tail plane it was that bloody old and I don't like flying. So anyway we flew into Collinsville but you could see the pilot and his co-pilot flying the plane and when they land apparently they got
- 21:00 to pump down the landing gear and I thought the plane was in the process of being crashed because you come down in stages and this bloke pumpin' away there and all that and I said, "Goodbye Jack," you know what I mean. You tell Peter you're comin' you know like at least leave the door open you don't have to barge into that and anyway they landed. Of course nobody expected little Jackie boy. So I had all my gear with me so I just camped on the side a the aircraft, the paddock down there. Aircraft took off and the next middle a the night somebody kicked me in the bloody ribs. "You
- 21:30 Vandam?" and all that. So, "Yeah, yeah that's me." "Oh mm yeah, right. You're gonna be a batman for the parliamentarians that are coming." I said, "Like bloody hell." I said, "I'm a craftsman not a bloody batman." No way was Jackie boy gonna be a batman. I just wouldn't do it and he said, "Well they flew you in here to be," I said, "They can flew me anywhere they like but I will not and I repeat not be a batman." I said, "I didn't join the army to wipe somebody else's backside or wash his socks." I said, "No way. I won't do it." He said, "Oh," you know they were gonna charge me and God knows what they were gonna do. I
- 22:00 said, "Do what you like." I said, "I will not be a batman." I said, "I happen to be a tradesman, like craftsman."

What

Well any

What's a batman?

Bum wiper for officers or parliamentarians or anything. Like a little gopher you know. Gopher this, gopher that but the batman is virtually the person that looks after yeah, I can servant. No bloody fear. I'm not no nobody's servant unless I wish to be so but that

- 22:30 was the batman. The parliamentarians apparently were goin' on a swan trip and you know they had to be looked after. You know you get 'em a cup a coffee in the morning and you do their washing and do this and every yeah. Yeah, not Jackie boy. So I flat out refused to do it. So they were gonna charge me by disobeying this and God knows what and I said, "Yeah, alright." You know I said, I said, "I'll go to gaol rather than I do that," but they didn't have any paper work to charge me. So somebody in their sense said, "Would you like to take charge of all the mobile
- 23:00 cookers seeing you fancy yourself a tradesman." See the army had great big kitchens on wheels and it had a wood fire boiler on it. I said, "Yeah," I said, "I'll take charge of all the boilers. No problem at all," and the law was that nobody gets hot water for a shave in the bush. So fully in charge a that. I enjoyed that because early in the morning you know the minute the boilers were goin' there's always somebody you know that thinks they got a bit of authority trying to
- 23:30 sneak boiling hot water out a the boilers so they could have a hot shave rather than a cold one. Oh the power and glory you know, I tell 'em to buzz off. You know like they weren't gonna get a hot shave. I had one and anyway when the whole exercise was finished I was told, "Righto Jack. We're willing to drop all the charges," like from the early piece and you know, "Providing you're willing," you know like, "Apologise
- 24:00 and we're willing to forget all about it." I did use some rather strong language when I got my bloody ribs kicked in. I said, "Yeah I'll apologise for calling you people such and such and such and such and such and such and such," and away I went. When I got back to my own lines the business had caught up that I was falsely charged for being away without official leave and had stolen the bloody mail stamp that was never, ever missing at any stage a the game. So I said to the boss up down there I said, "Well," I said you know I said, "I'd like to go back home and sort that out," because I was tryin' to get a loan to

24:30 build a house. You know like and having your pay stopped didn't give me a very high reliability status.

Did you have much communication with Gillian during this time?

Oh letters. We were just communicating. I was never missing you know but for the army to them I was. They stopped my they didn't stop my pay but they stopped her pay. See in those days married people had to make a marriage allowance and I always made an allowance the highest as I could to the wife you know what I mean. I just

25:00 kept a few bucks you know like that's a way of life. So they put me as quick as they could go back to Sydney. So they put me in a charge of a train, a whole trainload of broken down army equipment. Oh there were trucks and vehicles and stuff like that and anyway the cook, I was off signing in the kitchen there for awhile. The cook took pity on me and he said, "Oh Jesus Jack you're gonna be on travelling allowance," you know what I mean and he said, "There's nowhere you can do

25:30 anything," so he made me a great big food parcel up and all that and anyway they took me down to the train. I had all my bloody gear with me and I just made myself comfortable in the back of a vehicle and I travelled on that train from Mackay every station, every siding. It took me three or four days to hit Brisbane. Being an old railway man we get into the railway yard down there. By that time I was three, four days beard. No way you could wash yourself anywhere you know what I mean. They changed train crews and all that but I

26:00 don't think that half the crew even knew they had a passenger in the back. There was plenty of food down there. When I hit Brisbane shunting yard, being an old railway man I get off the train. The engine had gone off. I walked into the places where all this takes place and I'm I said to the blokes down there I said, "Oh I said I'm on this blasted military train." I said, "What time," you know, "Is this train gonna shunt out?" Like to go we had to go to one of the depots outside a Brisbane and he said, "Oh," he said, "That train's not gonna go 'til tonight some time." I said

26:30 "Yeah righto." So I made my way dirty and filthy, it was a Sunday morning, to the military barracks down there and I told 'em you know. They Jesus they wonder who the hell had walked in you know. Unshaven, pretty bloody grotty and all that and anyway somebody took pity on me but then when it got a little bit higher it was under no circumstances you know like to be listened to, taken notice of and, "Get back on your bloody train." When I get back to the yard they put on a special and the train had gone. So I'm in the middle

27:00 of nowhere. All my gear on this train. So one of the railway blokes down there, being old railway and knew the, just as well I knew that bloody system. They said, "Oh," he said, "there's one of those," little motor bike things that they get on the road, "it's going up past there." He said, "That train will be sitting in a siding somewhere." So, "Okay I'll take you," you know. "When they see you they'll fix you up." So anyway I get myself onto one of those motorbike things and we're just near the racecourse down there and here is my train. So the bloke pulled over. I got onto the train

27:30 and no crew on the train. They were just there for God knows what. So I went back into my wagon and all that and by that time I was absolutely clapped out. So I was pretty tired. So the next thing I wake up, I'm into this yard and for some reason I had it in my mind that they would have guard dogs there and all that. So I got off the train, found myself a great big lump a bloody wood. I thought, "Anyhow if there's gonna be a bloody guard dog this way," you know, "at least I stand up and defend myself." So I found where the night watchman was

28:00 behind twenty foot fence and all that you know what I mean and he's there havin' a nice cup of tea, reading the paper whatever they do and I knocked on the window on the inside. That man just about had a standing heart attack you know what I mean and oh God Jesus he was in a state of bloody shock. He didn't expect anybody to stand there after all that security you know and I said, "Oh," I said, "I've been on the train all along," you know what I mean, "I was sound asleep." I wasn't gonna tell him that you know what had happened. So they ring up the army bloody mob. "Oh we found the bloke," and all that. They brought

28:30 a wagon in and all that and had a chance to clean up and I had to report into Sydney. Now my wife lived in Hornsby. So I got off the train in Hornsby. That was early in the morning so I was gonna see her and knocked in and everybody I had in total bloody shock but I had to sort out my being away without charge that I never was. So I finished up being posted back to the unit and I had no intentions of going back to one of those the adjutant

29:00 got in a fair bit of trouble you know because the rumours were spreading and there was absolutely no need for it. So I finished up from there to Sydney no, to 101 and in those days that unit didn't have a very good reputation. You were out in the field a lot which didn't worry me. I lived close by that time and it was I was there for a short time and I got promoted to sergeant and in those days we were doing a lot of

29:30 trial work. The army was being reorganised and we became a pantropic division and we became this and we became that and all new equipments came in that had to be tried out. So I was either between Victoria and our unit taking things back and picking things up being out in the bush. Well we gave them a trial out the hard way and the commanding officer in those days was another legend in the corps, Hollywood George, and if at any

- 30:00 comes up he was our major and he was a Second World War veteran and he lived in Tweety Land. That's why he got Hollywood George. The things that he's done in his life and he hadn't done in his life and some if it was absolutely poetry in motion and he insisted always that signed for all the paper work and everything this and it means that nothing ever got through the system and all that and the thing that really stood out with Hollywood George the whole unit
- 30:30 was to be issued with American webbing. You know like all the new the whole (UNCLEAR). So I got it all in, we issued it all out and everybody got a little booklet, I've still got it here. How to put it together, how to put it on and all that and with everybody spick and span. So Hollywood in his wisdom borrowed the corps regimental sergeant major and he was gonna have a parade and inspect each and every man on that parade. So that was gonna be fun and
- 31:00 games. So everybody's lined up and the whole lot that's takin' place and here comes Hollywood George marched on with his borrowed RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] that knew everything there was to know about it. George had his helmet on back to front and the RSM had his gators on back to front. Very hard to keep a straight face because you know they were the experts. So anyway he inspected each and every man and picked on each and every man for being incorrectly dressed and here is this boss with his and it's impossible, I've got one a those helmets
- 31:30 here, it's impossible to get one a those things easily on back to front but he managed but that's the sort a bloke he was and the RSM when it was all finished we were in the mess you know like and pointed it out and he said, "Oh," he said, "I was in a hurry and I put those gators on without my legs crossed." It's impossible to put 'em on that way when your legs crossed. He didn't bloody well know. So we made somebody made fun of him and that got a little bit unpleasant but that was all Hollywood. He
- 32:00 also did a tappet adjustment on a Cessna aircraft flying over the South Pole strapped to the wing. That's the you know the stories are absolutely fantastic but when it came to signing all the hues of trial stuff the crew I was working with were fed up with him having to sign everything. So somebody said they said, "We'll soon stop this." They put in a piece a request for a camel. Well there's no such thing you know. He said he, "George'll sign it," and he did and somebody that
- 32:30 we sent it away through the system to be issued a camel and the paper came back, "One hump or two humps? Petrol or diesel?" You know they thought it must a been some sort of a joke and the next thing George comes bloody screamin' into the office. He said you know he said, "I can't understand those people down there. I just fail to understand. They know all the equipments we've got here are all run on petrol. Now why would we want a diesel?" He never even realised that he signed for a Goddamn bloody camel you know
- 33:00 what I mean. That's the sort a bloke he was. So anyway you know like and then he had to go. So he had behind his name MBE ED, ED MBE. That is Efficiency Decoration and he was one a the decorated Member of the British Empire, that's right and all the papers he wrote ED MBE and we had one a the wags doing all this typin'. He put typed it out the routine orders for the week
- 33:30 'ID IOT' and he signed it and for weeks everybody kept lookin' at all the orders that are coming through signed Major Such and Such Idiot. You know like it went through the sys the sort a bloke he was. So anyway when he moved out he was gonna take on the engineer workshop that eventually finished up going to Vietnam and on the farewell he said to me he said, "You Vandam might as well start pickin' your gear as well." He said, "You're gonna go over to the engineers," I said, "Oh God
- 34:00 don't let me suffer that as well," and I did. He became the commanding officer of Y engineer equipment workshop. It's a fictitious unit but he was also the boss of the engineer workshop which was then an LAD to eventually go to Vietnam but he got posted out. A lot a changes takin' place. The unit only consisted of a major and myself. It was just a great big tent city and that
- 34:30 was part of the new organisation. We never used it other than I was entitled to a truck and I drew that because we were always short of vehicles and I remember being on an exercise with Little Hollywood and Borneo started off and he said to me he said, "Righto Jack," he said, "Grab my ute [utility vehicle]." He said, "Go home. Open up everything up," he said, "The whole unit is going back." He said, "We're all goin' to Borneo. Say goodbye to your wife." He said, "You're the first to go and set up the advance party." So, "Yeah, no problem." Still waiting to go but that's besides the point.
- 35:00 Got back to Sydney from this exercise and said to Gil I said, "Oh well," I said, "Looks like I'm away to Borneo." Everybody went but I had too much rank by that time and I couldn't go and I offered to drop my rank but no way they weren't gonna have that. So I stayed back and most of the blokes that with the early intake to Vietnam had gone to bloody Borneo and I was pretty browned off with that because you know like part a the unit and all that. George never went either. So they all went
- 35:30 or in the process a going and the ones that stayed behind we were slotted to do an exercise at the with the part time army, the CMF, up near Newcastle. I can't think a the name a the camp. There's a great big camp down there and anyway the boss down there finished up takin' that unit, or a unit to Borneo and towards the end a the exercises he came up to me he said, "Jesus Jack," 'cause I was sergeant then. He said to me he said, "Your fame's been made." He said, "You're now
- 36:00 in charge a the whole workshop." He said, "I'm going marching out," he said, "I'm going to take the unit to Borneo." Bluey Draper. He said, "There's only one thing wrong Jack." I said, "This afternoon," I said, "I'm the task force commander over the radio," you know what I mean, "To organise all the exercises,"

and he said, "You got to take my place." He said I said, "You got to be bloody jokin'." You know like I had no idea how to do that. I said, "Yeah alright Bluey," you know I said got on the he went and I took charge of the whole

- 36:30 workshop and very proud a that. I had no idea what the whole score was but I had the highest rank there and I could see this little fella wandering around, great big gun on him. Great big skid lid on and anyway he's wandering through all the vehicles down there and I wandered over in a very benevolent mood you know like feeling the big grasp of power and I said, "What's up son?" Everybody to me is son. "What's up son?" He said, "Oh," he said, "I'm lookin' for my vehicle," and I said, "Oh well," I said, "There's only a," you know, "a few dozen down there," you know I said you know, "So have your pick." I said, "What's
- 37:00 your problem?" "Oh," and I said, "What's the number?" "What type is it?" He didn't know. I said, "Oh it's bloody brilliant isn't it?" you know like and anyway I said, "Look son," I said, "come with me." I said, "Just," you know I said, "and you might remember what your vehicle was," but anyway he's pointing to the padre's wagon. Now normally padres and all that get the worse vehicle you can find because you know like they're pretty low in the pecking order and I said, "Oh Christ," I said, "you're not lookin' at the padre's wagon are you?" and he said, "Yes," he said, "I'm the padre." He had a jumper on,
- 37:30 couldn't see his badges a rank or what he was. Great big gun on him. Now why a padre would want to carry a gun I'll never know and I said, "Oh," I said, "Bloody padre's bike?" and he said, "Yeah," he said, "And I've got to go here and there," and oh by that time I felt a bit sorry for the poor little bugger and I said, "Look," I said, "I you promise to bring it back in one piece," I said, "You can borrow mine." I had my own Rover like army Rover and I let him have it. So a few days went on. I stuffed up the whole exercise over the radio because there were two Yanks, one on
- 38:00 the enemy and one on the other one and one got on the blower. I knew it was a Yank and he wanted a vehicle or something and at the meantime trying to work out what all this was about. Somebody came in with a couple a prisoners. You know this is all on an exercise. "What I will do with the prisoners?" I said, "Take 'em around the tree and shoot the bastards," you know like. Wasn't last of my bloody problems. So the next thing somebody came in, "You can't shoot prisoners," and I was the technically the whole commander for the whole bloody lot and I took it at a very low joking level you know.
- 38:30 Just as well it was the last day a the bloody exercise. So anyway when they found out that I was doing all that you know like I was more or less told to buzz off. So the unit was gonna organise the farewell party and all that and they came over to me the blokes and they said, "Jesus Jack," they said, "What should we put on for dinner and all that," and I said, "Don't bloody ask me." I said, "I'm a bloody Buddhist," you know I said, "I only eat rice," and I don't know what made me say it. So anyway the dinner takes place and the padre comes
- 39:00 over again, little bloke and he nudged me and he said, "Jeez how do you find life in the army as a Buddhist?" and I'd forgotten what I said by that time you know. I said, "What the bloody hell are you gettin' on?" you know. I said, "Well," I said, "You come from overseas and all that and being a Buddhist could a been quite right." You know and I said, "Oh," I said you know, "It was just only a bloody joke. I didn't want to get involved in," you know, "What we're gonna have for tea and all that." I said, "Go and have a beer," and it was years and year and I call him still calling him 'son'
- 39:30 and I should have called him, being a good padre 'Father' and all this sort a crap you know like. So I'm in Berry years and years later, it must a been way in the '70s. I'm wandering around down there. Sam Brown and the whole bloody lot and this little hand comes on my shoulder, "G'day Father I haven't seen you for a long time." I looked around and here was bloody son. You know by that time I think he was the top God botherer in the whole Australian army but he'd never forgot the thing.
- 40:00 That shows you you know what I mean though how things can eventuate.

Well we'll hold it there.

Yeah.

'Cause we're right at the edge of this tape.

Tape 6

- 00:39 **Jack thanks again for your time. Vietnam's beginning or begun actually**
Mm.
- But when did you receive news that you were going to Vietnam?**
Well it looked like that Vietnam became inevitable in I would say ooh about '65 and we sent advance party down
- 01:00 when we did went but we did also send to my knowledge a couple of advisers and one of 'em got shot up early in the piece in a patrol. I remember goin' to his funeral. I knew his wife and I knew him quite well

actually and it became inevitable and the unit I was in was in well pretty well in the first lot to go. We did a lot a trial work in loading the Sydney and that was quite interesting too because I remember takin' trucks down and all that like to work out loads and stuff like

- 01:30 that and somebody forgot to take off one a the clamps on the deck a the Sydney and had a bit of trouble taking off but he put it in low low and threw it and half the deck came up with him. It was a really good ship. Quite comfortable providing you didn't have to do too much on it. The trip across was actually quite uneventful. When we were told, we had to get the whole unit ready. Basically the trials were done and here was where experience really came in. Now I
- 02:00 don't like to make myself worth more than it really is but in a workshop, particularly in a small workshop there is such a things as articles manufactured in workshop. They're not an army store. They're not anything that's you can buy on the shelves but it is normally a jig or some tool that the tradesman are made up to make the job easier and they're worth their weight in gold because they well and truly do the job you know like that we made it to do. Of course when all
- 02:30 the business came out we had to make up scales to take, spare parts to take. We did all that ourselves in the preparation time and well I was involved in that because ultimately you know like it was at that stage of the game my job to ultimately get it and we always take on exercises and in war situations in the training twenty one days' supplies on just about everything. Like your normal consumable expendable stuff like, I know it sounds funny, toilet paper, sand paper.
- 03:00 I don't see the difference in some a the army stuff but that type a stuff. You had to have twenty one days of all the sort of supplies. That all had to be weighed. It had to be packed and it had to be stowed. I had my own transport as such but the thing that always sticks in my mind was the mechanics put in all the requirements for spare parts and it all was done within scopes and then there was block scales for this and block scales for that but it's the experience that really counts and the articles
- 03:30 manufactured in workshop in some cases were stuff that we used all the time. Of course the first order that came through they weren't to be taken. They had to be gotten rid of. So Jackie boy the first thing he did is worked it in the load to make sure that they somehow passed all the weight instructions and all that and believe it or not the first tools we used in Vietnam were exactly those bits and pieces because but that's sheer difference between experience and somebody reading a piece a paper. So they went and we loaded everything
- 04:00 up and to my knowledge the unit has never, ever wanted for anything. The planning was really well done. We had a few incidents down there. I remember Tiny, the he was the artificer sergeant major. I remember him marching in on promotion from Grade 2 to Grade 1. I remember the boss marching in. I'm not quite sure who was in charge down there. Nobody greatly cared but two incidents I'll never, ever forget. We took part over of the military school of engineering and we were given some back lot to set all this up and of course there is an ablution
- 04:30 block there with toilets and stuff like that. So I sent one of the little minions over to the supply system to get toilet paper and he came back, "No way. We're not getting toilet paper," and I said, "Oh come on." I said, "Look," I said, "I'll go over and I'll sort that one out." I said, "In the meantime go to the carpenter shop with a great big box of paper towels and either cut 'em in half or in three bits. I frankly don't care. Use your own initiative." You know like so anyway he was doing that. I went up to the main supply business and I was told
- 05:00 that none of my crew lived in on the base so therefore they had to bring their own toilet paper or go home. That's a typical army stupidity and I said, "Yeah alright," you know what I mean. I said, "I problem solved." You know I couldn't be bothered arguin' over stupidity like that. I was told that the allocated scale of toilet paper was three sheets. One up, one down and one shine and that was exactly what the book and the scaling, a typical paper work you know what I mean and I can't really abide
- 05:30 by that. So anyway we were using paper towels. No problem. So a couple a days later the area commander of the whole of the Liverpool area comes storming in around the school and they were lookin' for the place that clogged up the whole sewer system in Moorebank. The all the paper towels they don't decompose apparently quite as quick and I blocked up the whole system. Everything. The whole works virtually came to a standstill and it was worked down to our ablution block you know. Like so anyway you can well imagine you know like
- 06:00 "Jackie boy please explain," and I said, "Well," I said, "what do you want me to do?" I said, "I'm flat out." I said, "The last thing I got on my mind is worryin' about one up, one down and one shine," you know what I mean, "or bring your own." I said, "What about a poor bloke," I said, "if I give him a hard time," I said, "he'll have the runs for the rest a the day." You know I said, "He he'd be running around with nothing else but rolls a toilet," I said, "Look," I said, "I don't even want to argue about it," you know. I said, "Okay," I said, "we're in an engineer unit and their motto is engineer initiative," you know what I mean. I said, "I used my bloody engineer initiative and, the best
- 06:30 thing next, and I said, "and I don't like putting newspaper through the system," and I did. So the next thing from the supply could I please come over and I had a choice of pink, blue, red whatever, whatever colour you know what I mean. It solves the problem. Not a problem but that's the sort a stupidity where you're getting ready for a war that really mattered and you got to put up with a the sheer stupid mindedness of some paper pushers. You know and that's exactly what it meant. People that are put in a

- 07:00 job and they just can't handle it. So that solved itself but I also had two blokes with me. One was a 'Jubablobbyblobblipski' or some bloody name. I couldn't pronounce it and another one was pretty close to it but I didn't have a Brown and I didn't have a Smith. So when they marched in I said, "Look," I said, "I'll be calling the roll every morning." I said, "From now in for the purpose of the roll call you're Brown and you're Smith," you know, "so I can tick you off." So you know I did and I remember our boss, Brian, marching in and
- 07:30 he to get to know the people you know like he was standing there watching a little later and he called me over and he said, "Jeez Jack," he said, "I can't what you the numbers are right," he said, "But there's something wrong with the names," and by that time I'd been doin' it for quite awhile and everybody just accepted it you know. I said, "What the bloody hell are ya gettin' at?" I said, "Well tomorrow morning," I said, "I'll make it an officer on parade," you know. I said and, "Brown, Smith," and all there and then it clicked with me and he clicked it too and I said, "Oh, Brown and Smith," I said, "Well," I said, "Have a good look at the roll book," you know. "Jibablog," I said
- 08:00 "By the time I finish there's a day work is gone," you know, "So I rechristened 'em," you know. "Not a problem." "You bloody wog," you know like

So where were the where were Brown and Smith from?

They were soldiers. They...

The foreign names?

Oh yeah one was a most probably a Yugoslav or you know like they were definitely funny names and I remember one of 'em actually came in very proudly a few years later, Gil knows him too but he came in. He had his name changed by deed poll.

- 08:30 He was Fidora Wizblogablob and he changed it to Fred. Never mind doin' the hard bit you know like but those things were happening quite a bit but they were only the minor things. Then when we did actually get the whole show on the road we drove to the Sydney and we stowed everything away and being a sergeant we I didn't have to go down below. We finished up bunking on the on one of the senior sailors' mess decks above board. On the couch actually. One thing I could
- 09:00 never hack is sleepin' in bloody those swinging hammocks. You know I like a good night's sleep and besides that I'm not all that fond a the navy and I don't want to sleep down below, not on the Sydney anyway. So away we went and during the day we did a fair bit of training you know like to keep fit but prior to that in the engineers we had a bloke that was in the occupation forces in Japan and he was a judo expert and he was the one at that time the highest in Australia I think, or if not he would a been pretty
- 09:30 well amongst it. Finished off his trade in Japan from the masters and every lunch time oh for a long time you know like he taught a few of us you know like all the ins and outs of judo and I remember on the Sydney somebody, an expert was gonna give us all hand to hand combat lessons. So anyway you don't advertise those bloody things and they laid all the mats out on the deck a the Sydney and all that and
- 10:00 you know like normally they grab the smallest bloke or the biggest bloke and well I'm reasonably sized. So they anyway they grabbed me and the bloke said, "Now just come at me and just have a go." Well that wasn't a bloody problem. So I just, in the proper hold, just floored him you know like I mean that's what he said to do and he wasn't greatly impressed and you know I said, "Well what's your problem?" You know what I mean. I said, "Look," I said, "That's what you told me to do." So he said, "Oh," he said, "You know a bit about it do you?" I said, "Well"
- 10:30 I said, "You did ask me." I said, "Yes I do." So we did that for a fair bit. Kept fit and all that and then we had some machine guns aboard and you know like we just put tins over the side you know like and sharpened up a bit on some a the techniques and then we hit Vung Tau harbour and there we were taken aboard off the ship by American barges and on one
- 11:00 a the bar, they were Yanks. One of 'em had a they're all got name tags on and one of 'em had a Dutch sounding name on it and I started talking to him thinking he might a been like an Australian you know like a new American or something like that but anyway he just had a Dutch name. I'd forgotten that the pilgrim fathers were there in the dim dark ages. He must a come with that lot but the thing was the navy had a great big clean up aboard ship and for some reason I found a forty four gallon drum full of all sailor caps that they'd
- 11:30 threw out that were hadn't been used and all that and I found a place for them. I could see trading material here with the Yanks. Oho boy what an opportunity. So I went to the purser's store and bought all HMAS Sydney bands, a whole roll a the bloody stuff, and I was the only one in Vietnam with sailor's caps and that was trading material mate. I already got rid of one cap aboard the when we got off the Sydney because they were using flak jackets and I liked them because if somebody was gonna throw stuff at me you know like we were never issued with them, never used it anyway
- 12:00 and oh the word got around pretty quick, "Oh bloody Vandam's aboard," you know like

So let me just jump in at this point.

Yeah.

You were married before you left for Vietnam?

Oh yes. Yes. Yep.

So your wife saw you off?

Oh yes, the whole family. My father, mother came down. My brother and his wife. Well like my kids, my kids were already born. My daughter, my little son. Oh they were too young to realise really what was going on but I mean my wife

- 12:30 had been brought up a army, navy, air force. She had worked for 'em and well fair enough. I mean I was being paid to do a job. I mean they didn't like me going I don't think and then again you know like I always reckon good riddance for twelve months but no, I think that they knew the story the score and actually they were a good support too. You know like letters and all that no trouble at home and they formed a bit of a wives' club because everybody in the unit knew one another and if I may say this, I think that is what made
- 13:00 the Vietnam War after us very, very bad. We got replaced on an individual basis and I'll draw arguments on this with the management but we went as a unit. We knew everyone and I didn't realise it 'til a couple a years ago. One of the blokes was a late replacement in Australia. He never trained with us and he always felt one out and when he told the story really I could see why because once you we trained in Canungra, we trained everywhere. Everything
- 13:30 was done as a group. With the engineers and 5 battalion because we were all part and parcel of that whole business. We knew a lot of people down there and we were a unit. We all were one a the system. Then when you get replaced on a one for one basis A, the newcomers were regarded as just newcomers and the old hands didn't want a great lot to do with 'em. You know like they had their own group and all that and I think that's been very, very bad for morale. I really mean this
- 14:00 and I think that the Yanks have proved it as well and it was a bad thing in Australia. I got replaced, I don't know who my replacement was. I got involved with something that went off with a loud bang and I lost my hearing there for awhile and I was the first one to go home as a medivac. That was I just on doing twelve months anyway but I would have been up for an individual replacement and as a matter of fact most of the unit was home before me because they flew me from Saigon to Penang and I was in Penang in hospital for awhile and from
- 14:30 Penang to Darwin and nobody took a great lot of interest really who replaced you. All you were waiting for to be replaced and I remember when they said farewell to me in Vietnam they said, "Oh Christ," they said, "When Vandam's gone I wonder what he's traded for an early return home." You know what I mean because on my office I had a sign, "The Ettamogah pub," an original, and, "Van's trading post." You know like well that's what you were and it got out a hand a bit at one stage. I remember
- 15:00 a chopper coming down and this bloke heard of Van's trading post and he had a whole case of brand spankin' new Armalites [M16 assault rifle] he wanted to trade. I was only in spare parts and if somebody wanted a spanner we didn't have I used to go to the you know it was just a small joke more than anything else but those Yanks thought that was really a business. So I sent him with those weapons up to the Special Air Service. We looked after them for their weapons. We had a good a couple a good armourers with us and you know and they were right next to us and
- 15:30 you know like I don't know what the outcome of that was. I frankly didn't want to know but the Yanks early days very, very naïve. They were nice blokes don't get me wrong but honestly when they get against some a the practical Australian jokers and what have you they're just way out a their league. The thing was that we had the only wrecker in Vietnam. That's a great big truck with a crane on it and if you get bogged they just pull you out. It's like a big crane
- 16:00 thing and the operator went out of action rather quick early in the piece and Tiny and myself were the only two with a licence only. So immediately you lose your licence and a new one they forgot to put driver only on it, so technically speaking we used the truck. I mean I'm not a recovery mechanic but I can drive the damn thing and I can do some a the easier jobs and we didn't really have all that many hard jobs. So we managed and we worked with the Yanks a fair
- 16:30 bit in that line too because they we had two artillery units with us, the (UNCLEAR) battery and another one. One was from the North, one was from South and racism was quite a thing even in those days and I'm talkin' what, '66. The Yanks by that time were pretty wary of the Australians. They reckon that anything that wasn't nailed down the at some stage a the games the Australians will knock it off. So they put the sign in four forty four gallon drums a concrete
- 17:00 so we couldn't knock it off. I mean the same night with the wrecker on it, it just lifted drums and the whole bloody lot out. So we were building a bit of a sergeants' mess for the engineers ourselves out of bits that we scrounged and a bit a concrete that we found. So we made the bar out a that sign and we had Yanks coming over quite regularly and you know couldn't wonder who could actually pick up a sign like that and knock it off without them knowin' about it. They were drinkin' beer from it for God's sake. They never knew you know. So
- 17:30 the cooperation between the Australians and the Yanks was actually quite good. You know like they a lot of 'em were astonished by the fact for the short time we'd been in Vietnam we learned to speak English

so well and if you mentioned Wagga Wagga and Woolloomooloo oh my God the beer was flowing on the house you know like. You could virtually tell 'em anything 'til they were actually woke up there were two sides to the Australians. You know like give 'em a hard time you'll know about it because up at the Vung Tau air base, we

18:00 were still in Vung Tau before we went to Nui Dat. That was would a been the first week or so. Something came up that had to be done and one a the advance party blokes said, "Oh," he said you know he said, "go up to the airport." He said, "They most probably can do it." So anyway to cut a long story short I went up to the bloody airport and while they were doing their job I found this little watering hole and it said there, "American servicemen or second class citizens only," and it was where you could get a beer you know like or soft drink or whatever. Just a little canteen thing. So we wandered in and

18:30 oh they had a couple a drinks and I said to this bloke I said, "Look," I said, "What's a second class citizen?" you know and he said, "You guys. You're not American servicemen so you're a second class bloody citizen." So we demolished that joint and told him. I said, "That's what the second class citizens can do mate." I said, "Don't ever, ever pick on the professionals." No, that was a straight out bloody insult. That those signs disappeared so fast but that was their...

Sorry, we'll just pause there.

I forgot about that stinkin' thing.

19:00 Right again? Yeah, she's gone away with it.

We might be able to just pick it up. Claire's [interviewer] just checking.

Jack you were saying about the Americans.

Mm.

Were they good blokes at all?

Oh basically they were alright. They stood a bit in awe of us because they'd heard a lot a rumours from their forefathers no doubt. You know like, "Bloody Australians this and Australians that." That second class citizen bit didn't go over too well with us but I mean that was only just a thing a the

19:30 at the time but we had a lot a cooperation from the Yanks. I made a hell of a lot of friends with the Yanks in my job. I mean when something had to be gotten I either got it from the Australian, from the Yanks. No problem. We worked with 'em a fair bit mainly because you know they have stuff we didn't have and we had American equipment. The only thing that we really liked about the American equipment most a their stuff was mobile. We found a washing machine walkin' across the road unattended. It just

20:00 wandered across the road and washing machine, Jesus there's nothing nicer than washing your uniform through a machine rather than and when we set it all up we found they only used hundred and ten volts. So we had to find another walking transformer to get it from 240 to 110 and lo and behold they were that well trained we even found one a them walkin' along the road and not to be content with that, they also had coffee making machines. Like great big coffee machines that had the habit of wandering out of American camps and

20:30 Jesus there's nothing nicer than you have brewed coffee because we were, in the early days, on American rations and they had coffee in five kilo tins and there was ground coffee, never mind that instant garbage, I can't stand the stuff, and we had the coffee machine going down there virtually non stop and the only rule was if you're an outsider you take a cup out, you put a cup a cold water back in. It was one a those percolatin' things and oh God I tell ya what, I'd been a tea drinker but we changed to coffee there.

21:00 **Just so I understand where there is, there is Nui Dat is it?**

That was up at the forward base by then. Yeah, Nui Dat.

Okay.

And the Yanks worked with us. We worked with the Yanks and we had a lot of Yankee visitors too like from the various units because the durin' the months there we were developing a few funnies. The engineer's job was to clear tunnels as well. We had a tunnel clearing section, the tunnel rats, and it made us famous down there.

21:30 I've never been down tunnels but the blokes that did I really admire 'em. They were the smaller blokes unfortunately. They went in there virtually stark naked with a pistol in their mouth or a knife and they found all sorts a stuff. Being good Australians there's always way of working out easier ways and they worked on a thing called the Mighty Mouse. It was a great big jet engine and you put that in front of a tunnel hole and then you start the engine up and you put smoke through it and you can see all the little puffs of smoke coming up through the ground. You could follow

22:00 the tunnel system. They did try it up in our base and we found a few little puffs coming up here and there when it was supposed to be all cleared but that was all in good fun because there was nobody

there, nobody in it. We'd a worked on that a fair bit. Another thing that the Australians there developed was a thing known as Foo Gas. It was basically in layman's term a drum of napalm that you could command detonate and we used to put 'em, we didn't use all that many but the Yanks were in favour of

22:30 it. In twenty litre drum with petrol you put the napalm powder in it, what makes it napalm. It charged in it so when you blew it, it ignited at the same time over an area and you do that with a forty four gallon drum that covers quite a bit of area and that way that's the only way you could stop the Charlies coming in through the wire at night.

Sorry, can you just explain that again? The Charlie, meaning one of the Viet Cong; the Charlies?

Well we...

Coming in?

Well if they hit us on the wire...

Under mass...

And we knew where...

Yeah.

We could either set off

23:00 claymores [mines].

Yeah.

Which is an a plastic mine in a half shape that you face to the enemy and it just shoots out a number of ball bearings and that's command detonated. There's a wire runs back to your command post and if you see or you think somebody's down there and you can hear 'em on the wire you just press the button and goodbye but the Charlies were not dumb. If they could turn those things around they rattled the wire with a

23:30 piece a string, you press the button and you wear it. So we put on lifting devices so that the minute you play around in it to turn it around something else'll go off and there was always improvements going on and the Foo Gas was one of 'em. That was the same not a claymore but it was a drum a petrol that was made into napalm and it was command detonated in such a way it had a charge on it that actually ignited the stuff. So you mean you could blow things up but it not necessarily burns

24:00 and the idea was to you know disperse that napalm stuff from a charge. I mean you might see it where they're dropping it from planes and all that, well the impact spreads it and all that. We did it from the ground from command detonated gizmos. I honestly can't remember any time when we were on the perimeter there, well the time I was there from the day right through that we ever actually had to use napalm or

24:30 for that matter claymores. They were all set up and it was the job of us in our perimeter to go around every morning and night to check all that to see that nobody had interfered with it and that came down to one situation. There's always accidents happen and the battalion had an accident where somebody got shot accidentally and our illustrious leader at the time, Brian, and he's a good mate a mine and I shouldn't use the term illustrious leader but he'd come up through the

25:00 ranks and he was pretty worried not doin' the right thing you know like and he was determined to bring everybody home in one piece and he gave us the order that all patrols were to go out with the magazines in your pocket. So you actually went out you know like unarmed and the book says it only takes too many seconds to put it on but if you walk in an ambush they're there ready for you and by the time you do all that. Let's face it, you know like very few people ever heard a shot fired at you heard 'em fired in anger

25:30 but they were never in a situation like it and I like to have an even chance. I knew what it was all about. So the minute you take out a patrol, the minute you there's a starting point the minute you cross that patrol you are in charge a that patrol. So that didn't make any difference to me. The minute I got across, "Righto, mags [magazines] on. Forward scout, one up the spout, safety catches," and away you go and do your job and that went well. I never short of volunteers because you know they knew damn well that I went with loaded weapons. I don't know what the other sergeants did.

26:00 Not my problem. So I came back from a patrol one day and here was Brian with two of a couple a junior sergeants. I'm going through the business of clearing and checkin' the gun, that the bullets were out of it and all that, normally safety precautions, and I was caught. I was told I was under arrest for disobeying a lawful command in the field and that's court martial stuff really and I said well I didn't greatly care you know. I said to Brian I said, "Oh well," you know. I said, "If you don't think I'm capable of handling a gun," I said, "Get

26:30 me on the next trip home," you know I said. So anyway took it quite seriously and anyway I looked like being in quite a bit a trouble over that. I've never faced the courts over that for the very simple reason I think when he took that whole story up to our main boss he most probably was told to grow up and you

know we were soldiers. I always had that impression but he thought differently. So it was not that much later and I don't quite remember whether I was actually taking a patrol out

- 27:00 or I was a spare wheel on a patrol. Sometimes if they were really short of blokes, I had plenty a time in my job. I used to go you know to relieve somebody else because patrolling didn't worry me. I liked the bush and I just another job and whether you're in charge or whether you are a spare wheel your position is normally in the middle. You know like you got your forward scout, your machine gun and all this sort a business and anyway we were wandering along
- 27:30 doin' our job and all of a sudden I noticed quite a lot of the things that shouldn't be there, like booby traps and all that. I don't know whether they'd been set or what but it not a very pleasant situation to be in at any stage a the game. a) the people that were playing around with it still could a been there. Secondly they could a been command detonated. That means that they're sitting back and when you're close they press the button and away ya go. So I immediately stopped the patrol. Put 'em in a
- 28:00 situation where they could defend themselves. I mean I didn't know what was going on. All I knew there was a pile a booby traps down there. I was pretty brownd off that I found them. That's what forward scouts are for you know I mean and anyway we got onto the blower and we got back and bring the experts up. Although I'd been trained to clear stuff like that that's awhile back and I believe letting the experts have a go in if it would a been necessary I would have had a go at it but I put in a set rep,
- 28:30 that's a where you are and all that and anyway the experts came over and we finished up and while they're doin' I went straight into Brian and I said, "Look," I said, "If you think," you know like, "That it's a boy scout's organisation you're got another thing comin'." You know like they were definitely they never had the chance to finish settin' 'em. So they realised then you know like that guns were necessary, strange as it may sound in a war situation but that's the sort a things you had to put up with.

But why in fact was the very order of not having...

Because we may have shot somebody accidentally.

- 29:00 See the thing the thing was I mean we don't like talking about accidents like that but it does happen. That first bloke that got shot in engineers while were still here he got shot in half with a machine gun. The somebody accidentally you know like stumbled and all that and had his finger on the trigger.

It was friendly fire that he got hit...

And he just and I mean it happened in peace time too. I was on the range in Puckapunyal before we went down there and a bloke climbed on a tank the wrong way and they cleared the machine gun and it just blew him to bits.

- 29:30 Oh I mean

Sorry, what happened there?

Well when you're on the firing range with tanks you don't get out of a tank. They had a stoppage and they're clearing it. So they needed a screwdriver of all things and this bloke got out a the damn hutch, got a screwdriver and instead of climbing up on the back he just hung onto the barrel of the machine gun and worked his way up and at same time inside they cleared the gun. They got the stoppage going and of course he wore the lot. I mean that's peace time.

- 30:00 It happens you know. I mean it doesn't sound nice but it's part and parcel of the job and the better you're trained the less this is likely to happen but it does happen. We had accidental discharges where somebody, normally when you're on patrol and you walk around you've got your finger next to the trigger guard. So you haven't got your finger in the trigger to begin with, there's no point in it, but all you got to do and away you go and if the you're not in a really red situation, see we didn't take out fighting patrols. There's different patrols.
- 30:30 There were ours was clearing patrols more or less to make sure that our immediate perimeter was pretty safe, not interfered with. If you go on a fighting patrol well that's slightly different. I mean you're in territory where you go lookin' for trouble. If you're on a reconnaissance patrol you go on a patrol to stay out of trouble and just gather intelligence. On a clearing patrol, what we were mainly engaged in, you may or may not
- 31:00 encounter any trouble so, well I found it like with the booby traps bein' set. Could a been anything. Could a been a half a dozen Charlies there. I mean I you don't know. So you so long the bloke up front his gun ready to go, because he would a been the first contact, none of us wear badges a rank. You know you're not gonna advertise the fact, "Look, I'm the boss. I'm the first one to go." So you know so you don't wear everybody knows ya and if they don't, well you worry about that at a later stage. So
- 31:30 you know like the chance of anybody being shot in our situation was pretty slim and I didn't believe it necessary to go with magazines in your pocket and I never did. I flat out refused to do it but apparently you know he made the order and some most probably he stuck by it. I've never been, I shouldn't say this, but to stick to rules and regulations if they didn't make any bloody sense. So anyway he must a been told to grow up and you know like from there on in I think the patrols

32:00 really went out with guns at the ready.

Let me ask you a couple a questions

Mm. Mm.

Of what you've already mentioned.

Mm.

The first question is the Australians had developed the smoke machine causing smoke

We worked on it with the Yanks, yeah. We yes, we

How did they create the smoke?

Well you get you know like stuff that makes smoke. Like smoke we had different smoke bombs. You know like if you want to bring an aircraft and the code for the day was two greens and a red you we all carried

32:30 'em. Like smoke grenades. So the composition of smoke quite simple. You just made sure that you had something big enough to blow it through the tunnel systems. They were working on that so when you put one in front of a known opening if you found one out in the scrub somewhere, rather than sending somebody in you could put Mighty Mouse in front of it. Whatever the smoke was created with just blows it through the tunnel system, as much as ya could and if you see puffs of coloured smoke coming out a the ground

33:00 you could see which way the tunnels went and sometimes in the huts and all that you know like where they actually were hidden because to find tunnels was a job on its own. You had to find 'em first. You might think they're there but that doesn't say that you're actually going to find 'em easily.

You also mentioned the tunnel rats, the Australian guys

Mm.

Got a good name for themselves.

Oh yes.

Why was that? What sort of stories came through to you?

Well the thing was a), the job wasn't very pleasant because once you got into a tunnel system they did everything to stop you from getting

33:30 into the tunnels. Human excreta and all that was normally put in places where you had to go and actually slide through it. If you got a scratch on you can just imagine what that do if you get hurt. Another favourite trick was to hang crate snakes by their tail in the tunnels and they're extremely poisonous but they're very small. They're only got a small mouth and the only thing that could really do anything with was get you in the earlobes or in between your fingers or toes because they were very small mouth but extremely poisonous snakes. So they were around. Broken glass.

34:00 Pansy pits, there's bamboo stakes with pins on it normally smeared with human excreta or anything that was you know cause pretty good infections and stuff what have you. Then hidden pits and hidden holes and all that and the only way you could go in there is with minimum clothing. No use going in there with packs and sacks. So what they mainly carried was a nine mil pistol and the only, half the time the only way to get out they had you know like put it in

34:30 between your teeth. So you know like yeah, that wasn't really the sort a job that anybody oh too many people volunteered for but it was a job and they did it and you know like the group that did I've got nothing but admiration for people like that and if they wanted to improve on any of the equipment that was our job. You know like we whatever they wanted you know was they only had to think of it and they'd have it.

So just in respect to obviously other things

Mm.

That Charlie would do to stop you entering it

35:00 **surely Charlie had to enter through those entrances.**

Oh yeah but they know, they had more than one entrance and one more than one hole. They might let you find a hole, see, and the and then if you yeah, the even some a the holes that they found down there had complete hospitals in it, complete workshops. They were complete systems and I'm and they had that goin' since the French were there since what, 1945? Some had been goin' since the Japs were there. Oh and they were set up and believe me they were set up.

So what

35:30 **stories came back to you in respect to how the Australians were coping with**

Well the I know that's the only people in my lifetime I'll ever call a bloody hero. They were bloody heroes for doing it because they the minute they went into a tunnel they took their life in their own hands. The even if they didn't see anybody in there, the stuff they had to go through and possibly get infected with you know like it wasn't very pleasant. The minute they came out of the jobs they were completely hosed down, new uniforms. Whatever they were wearin' was completely burnt, destroyed. They did

36:00 it. They felt it was their job and they did it and they did it well. I can't think of anybody ever complaining about it. They may not have liked it but they did it.

And you also mentioned that whatever they wanted it was your job to get it or

Well

Provide it.

They only had to mention you know like if they wanted something you know like anybody did you know to make things easier. See one thing is the their personal weapons in those days might a been a rifle or an Owen gun.

36:30 To go into the tunnels they wore pistols. Now I had a pistol and an Owen gun. It was my the minute there was a tunnel job on they all got our pistols. You know what I mean because there's no use goin' in there with anything else. If they felt that they needed something to make life easier for 'em, like the Americans had better boots than the Australians for some jobs. They were lighter and all like that. Well they only had to mention it and we were all out to do as much for 'em as you could. They, that was everybody. It was not

37:00 only me. That was just you know like what you were there for. We had a very, very close knit unit. The other job that we had to do was mine clearing and mine laying and another job that they had to do was building roads and we built the airfield up at Nui Dat. We built that in '66, '67 and that was quite an achievement too. The bloke that did most of it was a bloke called, we'll call him Harvey, and he was a character all of his own. He

37:30 married a Vietnamese girl and I run into him a couple a years ago and he still goes back to Vietnam a fair bit on trips and all that but right in the middle of that airfield is a hump. There was a great big rock foundation under it and we couldn't blast it out, it couldn't be shifted. So we left it there. It was known as Harvey's hump because he did nearly all the grader and all the bulldozing work on it. It was named officially as Luscombe Field. I don't know who Luscombe was and I don't greatly care but to us it was bloody Harvey's job and Harvey's bloody

38:00 hump and it was only designed ever to build, to land Caribou planes on. It was the biggest that could land there and lo and behold, and I've got photos of this too, the a Yank insisted on putting a Herc down there, a Hercules [transport aircraft], and I can see I know the reason why. They were flying a an whole plane load of mercenaries around and they couldn't land 'em in Vung Tau because the eyes a the world would a been upon 'em and the only way that could shift 'em

38:30 in any stage of the game was try to put 'em down up at Luscombe Field. So this Herc comes down and I happened to be there with my camera. The damn thing came down. It hit Harvey's hump and it just went airborne again. They were already in reverse and they stopped from here to you from solid bloody jungle on the end of the run you know like oh it was a feat of flying I believe me and then the doors opened you know like and all those little Chinamen came out and you know like

39:00 they're all mercenaries and we weren't to know about that.

We'll just

Mm.

Pause there.

Tape 7

00:43 Back at the airfield?

Yeah. Can I first...

Yeah.

Yeah, just ask you about the mercenaries?

Mm.

How did you know that they were...

Well they definitely weren't American and they definitely weren't anybody in our group and it was all

very secret and I think the word got around very, very smartly you know what I mean. "You haven't seen a thing."

01:00 End of story. The Americans did use mercenaries on various jobs and that's all you would find out too. If it were up the classifications were high enough and they landed and it's the only place apparently they could land and that's the only reason they ever put a Herc on that field but by God if you saw how close they went to come if they didn't have reverse on the props they would a kept on goin' you know like but they did land it. I'll tell ya what, you had a good American chopper jockey or a good flier. They were good. I've

01:30 nothing but admiration for their dust off people, that's the Red Cross fliers. They were absolutely they're oh only had to be there come hell or high water they were there. No, they were good. They were really, really, really, really number one and a lot of 'em were Negroes too.

Before we get on sort of

Mm.

To that particular subject, the green berets [US (United States) Special Forces] what were they like?

I only got across with them once. Pretty gung ho. We did a job with the a job came up with the green berets. It was

02:00 actually a job for the wrecker and we didn't have a wrecker, a wrecker jockey at the time. So

What's that?

That's the great big truck with the crane on. They had to do something that had to be done and anyway Tiny volunteered me and I volunteered Tiny. We were the only two who could drive the bloody thing. So away we went to this Van Kiep, that was the name a the place, green beret place and they were all either advisers or you know like and the job that had to be done we had to shift this and put this here

02:30 and all that and no problem. You know like there wasn't a shooting thing type a thing. We made a lot a friends there. That was one a the things and they were astonished at the way we learned to speak English so quick but then again an Australian by basic is pretty bloody smart to begin with. So when the job was finished their commanding officer, I'll never forget him. He would a been a good eighteen or nineteen stone. About six foot six and he was all muscle. Now Tiny is pretty big, that's why they call him Tiny and I wasn't a slouch but you know

03:00 like we were lookin' up to this bloke and he insisted on buyin' us a couple a beers when it was all finished. So they had a little canteen down there and the Moo..., they called him the Moose and he just looked like one and the Moose said to Tiny that I spoke English differently. You know like whether I was with a different American group to learn English or whatever it was and Tiny being Tiny said, "Oh bloody Dutchman," you know like. So I introduced myself as the Dutch adviser to the Australian army. I don't know what made me do it. It wasn't premeditated. I thought, "You bastards. If you

03:30 want to have a go," you know like I could and the Yanks accepted it. No problem. "Oh," you know like, "Bastard what ya doin'?" and all that. I said, "You know," I said, "The average Australian's pretty thick between the ears." I said, "They need a bloody Dutchman to put 'em on the straight and narrow." You know what I mean. Just joking about it. So when we came back to our own lines Tiny thought it was funny and I became the Dutch adviser to the Australian army. This would a been what, about oh about October or somewhere down there before Christmas. With my involvement at the orphanage and that,

04:00 I'll come to that in a minute, the nuns did us a pig, great big pig in the oven for the boys for Christmas and that made me a little bit late for the Christmas dinner because I had to pick it up and by that time a whole lot of Australian politicians were on the swung trip for Christmas to shake hands with the boys and all that sort a crap. You know like and when I came in I was wearing an American battle jacket and I'm in the process of, nobody

04:30 where there is alcohol wears a gun or have weapons. That's one thing is a definite no-no. You no use bein' half drunk and somebody starts an argument you start slappin' around. So we all had a nail in a tree somewhere and you just hung your belt and in my case pistol in it and well they looked up me coming in because the thing had already half started and I got introduced as the Dutch adviser to the Australian army. Some wag down there thought it was funny. So one of the politicians came over and he said, "Oh," he said, "I'm not

05:00 really aware that the Dutch are involved in Vietnam." I said, "Well," I said, "I can't tell a lie mate." I said you know, "This one is." Well you know and anyway they're just talkin' about different things and the normal conversation. A few days later our major called me in his bloody hidey out and I was told to make fun of politicians and no more this, no more that and I couldn't work out what the hell all the excitement was about but no more Dutch adviser bit.

05:30 Okay, no more Dutch it didn't skin a my nose. A couple a years later I was in Victoria Barracks in the sergeants' mess. There was a war on by that time and I had to be there for some reason overnight and a lot a the VIPs [Very Important Persons] go to the officers' mess in Victoria Barracks. Got the best wine cellar in the country and whenever they wanted to switch off and don't talk shop they used to go to the

sergeants' mess because we got a golden rule out there, day time is working time and when you have a couple a beers no shop. You know so they used to know that and

- 06:00 I came in and I just happened to be there and here comes the same clown that was I was talkin' about bein' the Dutch adviser. So we got introduced and I said, "Oh," I said, "We met before actually," and he looked up. I said, "You won't remember." I said, "Christmas '66, '67. Nui Dat. Dutch adviser." "Oh," and he got a big grin on his face and I said, "Well," I said, "You got me in a fair bit a trouble pal." Not that he did you know. I thought, "Well, make the conversation." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well," you know I said, "I was told to make fun of you people." I was
- 06:30 nearly gonna say, "You can do that by yourself just as well as me helping ya," and you know, "Got me in a bit trouble. Anyway it's a long time ago." "Oh anything I can do?" I said, "No, it's a bit late for that," I said, "but do me one favour. Just tell me the whole story. What happened for me to get into trouble in the first place?" He said, "Oh," and he thought, he could see the funny side of it really. What happened was when they got back after touring all the units they finished up in Saigon to do a press debrief. "Where did you go?" "Who did you see?" "Who did you
- 07:00 speak to?" You know like what we're doing now. You know like and he said, "Oh I went," he said, "I went to the battalion and went to the engineers, met the Dutch adviser to the Australian army," blah blah this and blah blah that you know. Dutch adviser to the Australian there's no such bloody animal. So wasn't very long that they found out who it actually was you know like he could see the funny side. I can still see the funny side. Still at reunions you know every so often one of 'em comes down. "Bloody Dutch," you know. I got me own back being a wog. I'd always been the butt of so many jokes
- 07:30 and it really stuck but the sad part of it was is I think he was the minister for defence. Now how the hell that he wouldn't have known that there was a Dutchman in or out of the bloody army really beats me. I have an idea that they got absolutely no idea what goes on in the world you know and even today none of 'em got a bloody idea what's going on but in hindsight during the Indonesian war with Holland there was a Dutchman down there that wasn't gonna give in to the Indonesians and he
- 08:00 was Turk Westerling and my father knew him and I knew of him and the Yanks didn't want him after the war. Nobody wanted him after the war and he finished up becoming a mercenary on the North Vietnamese side, so there were Dutch involved in the Vietnam war as such and I only found that out later and thought, "Oh Jesus," you know what I mean. I said, "I'd better be very careful here that I'm not finishing up being mistaken for somebody I'm not," but anyway that all died a natural death but coming back to those days, early days in
- 08:30 Vietnam that's on the orphanage side. How we got the pig in the first place.

Well before we actually get to the orphanage

Mm.

Side just a couple a questions

Mm.

About the green beret.

Mm.

They were or had the reputation of being one of the best sort of soldiers there but how did from an Australian point of view they compare to the Australian troops, particularly the SAS [Special Air Service]?

No, not a patch. I remember an American unit going through Canungra and they couldn't hack the bloody pace.

- 09:00 Now they're not necessarily all green berets. Unfortunately there are two different levels of mentality. A Yank if he really motivated to do something, "Please sir. I want to die. Let me go first." Australians haven't got that bloody mentality. The a lot a their training I think a lot of 'em are bloody straight out fanatics. A lot of 'em are very dedicated people, don't get me wrong. I think that with a hell of a lot of specialist troops
- 09:30 they are highly trained, they are highly motivated. The difference is in the Special Air Service all that they don't talk about it. With the Yanks if they're a green beret of course they've got the red beret and they were selected for being better than everybody else. They I wouldn't like to pick a fight with any of 'em don't get me wrong. I admire 'em for what they were doing but I think that the Australian mentality in all honesty was a damn sight different. They were we were feared in
- 10:00 Vietnam. The whole Australian army was. The Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese really respected the Australians in many ways. We never advertised what we did. Whenever the fighting patrols went out when they were gonna spend the night somewhere they just faced themselves out off the track. Nobody smokes, nobody talks, nobody think. We just fade out. The Yanks are just the opposite. They just clear the whole area with so many bombs and machine guns. So many helicopters flyin' overhead and Charlie'd be sittin' in the bush. "Two helicopters, x number of blokes." They either hit 'em or they
- 10:30 don't. To them losing a few blokes it's just not even worthwhile mentioning as casualties. With us every

bloke we lost was a loss of a bloke. No, I think all mentality in all honesty was entirely different. I spent the whole twelve months there on the front. I never been out on fighting patrols as such but I been there well I been through a mortar attack like that was before Long Tan and stuff like that. I still got shrapnel in my hand for that matter, not that that matters. I'm not saying that to be anything. The thing was we were all

11:00 doing a job down there and some did it better than others, mainly because they're differently motivated or they knew more. They were more a surviving level. I had little to do really with the green berets as such but I did spend a fair bit a time with one of the Australian advisers who was in a village a Hoa Long. That's between Nui Dat and Vung Tau. He was in armoured corps but I can't think of his name and that when I come to the orphanage that ties

11:30 in with an event that could have had very, very, very serious consequences. No the I think they had a reputation of being better than everybody else but I take everything the Yanks put down as being better than everybody else exactly what it means. You know like we never, ever dared bring it in American air support or anything like that. They killed more a their own than...

Let me if you could share with me...

Mm.

Just what happened

12:00 **in the mortar attack where you got some shrapnel in your hand.**

Well what happened was the I bunked with Tiny. We'd normally always bunk up with the same people you know like and the golden rule was you put on a clean uniform for the night and you sleep with your uniform and your boots, socks and shoes on and the whole bloody lot in case something did happen. We were hit on the wire virtually every night. You know like people tried to get in or somebody rattling the wires. There were alerts

12:30 nearly all the time. All forward pits were manned all night. You were on duty for the night. A sergeant went in and a few blokes and enough that one could have a sleep and two be on alert and in there, there was enough communications that if anything happens you know what I mean. You could get back onto the onto the management side of it and anything that was reported we reported it through us to the main party of the engineers because all fighting pits,

13:00 the water point and that was defended and then their pits started and on the right hand side were artillery and an artillery unit had very much the same system. Now the artillery's job was harassment fire. At any given time they let off so many rounds in any direction you know. Like if anybody happened to be there at the wrong time in the middle of the night they just wear it. It was just one a those things. That's an easy way of puttin' it. So guns going off was virtually all the time, day and night but at night time you just learned to sleep with it and this

13:30 particular night I always stripped. I can't sleep in bloody uniform unless I have to and you know like I like a good night's sleep. So I had a stretcher that I slept on and an American helmet, my Owen gun. It was very handy. You could take the butt out of it. So that was in my helmet, two magazines and a pair a thongs in the skid lid. So happily snorin' away down there and for some reason the guns woke me up and it had a different sound

14:00 to it and then I could see 'em exploding around us and I sung out to Tiny, "Tiny get off your arse. The shit's comin' in," because that's exactly what was happening. See when all the guns goin' I immediately knew the difference because I'd been on the receiving end and I and once you hear that you and then I could see it. So my job was my section to look after me should have been the fighting pits and stuff like that and then report back to our little command post that we had and Tiny's job was the other side of it

14:30 and all I could find was a pair a thongs, my skid lid and an old part of a raincoat. Wasn't gonna get dressed and all that so here's Jackie boy with a gun in his hand, a skid lid in one hand, a pair a thongs, a half raincoat. I'm running around the bush like a banshee making sure they're all stark bollocky naked you are. No problems whatsoever. Who cares? Had no women in those days in the army and even if they did if they haven't seen it before they wouldn't know what they were lookin' at anyway. So got all the blokes and by that time everybody was taking you know like the positions they were trained

15:00 to do and I made sure that they were all you know like secured and all that and even that threw some things because the following morning when we had a good look around one a the pits was full a rain water and there's two great big snakes in it and they'd been standing in the wrong (UNCLEAR) all bloody night. Oh Jesus. We did a few repair jobs when that was finished and anyway we got back to Brian, to the boss and waiting for the attack because after the mortar attack it started off on our perimeter

15:30 then it walks in and normally the enemy infantry fires up. I mean that's normal practice. So we're sitting there happily waiting you know like for the big event. Call it what you like. So I was in a I was pretty low in this hole in the ground and I could see between our pits something coming towards us crawling up you know what I mean and I was just thinkin' you know like I said, "Now how close am I gonna let him come before," you know

16:00 like, "I let him have it." See on an Owen gun the safety is a slide and you normally when you're running

around you keep that slide on because if you drop it on the ground or anything it's likely to go off and things go nice and quiet. So and the slide's only half a second you know like. So it was fully loaded, ready to go with the slide on. That means that the bolt can't go forward. Had one up the spout, the whole bloody lot 'cause we were expected to be hit and when I saw the first movement I'm just takin' the

- 16:30 slide off very, very nice and easy. No sound and I know the good book says, "Advance one and be recognised," bullshit and all that but by the time you do that they know exactly where you are and that to me is fantasy land. So I let him come closer and closer and I think he must a be... oh here to the ball down there and I thought, "Oh well," I couldn't quite work out why I could only see one. You know what I mean but then again the Charlies are pretty clever in doing that. Create havoc and confusion. So I'm just about ready to squeeze and let him have a few
- 17:00 and Tiny he was in a different posi [position] he could see me. He put his finger behind the trigger guard and I squeezed him a blood blister. One of my sergeants decided to come out a the pit to find out what was going on. You know he had radio and all that sort a stuff down there. He's a bloody idiot too, the bloke. So when we told him how close he was to shakin' hands with Peter up top you know what I mean he took a bit of a different attitude but that unfortunately some a the idiots we had to put up with and that bloke was a straight out idiot. He was a
- 17:30 good tradesman but when it came to commonsense and management I wouldn't feed him for anything. He we had a situation there too, to give you an idea what type of people you had to put up with. The mosquitoes in Vietnam were extremely clever animals. Now they were. They were the most switched on they reckon pigs are but I reckon mosquitoes are. Dead on six o'clock on the stroke of six they start to bite you and you get malaria. Not a second before six. Right at six o'clock. So
- 18:00 the joke was you know what I mean if you're lookin' for a new watch catch one a the mosquitoes and see how they're workin' it out and this pair a peanuts and a mate he had, right at six o'clock first you have a stop watch. They were running around trying who they could catch you know what I mean with their sleeves still up. You know stupid things like that. You could be in the middle of a job you know what I mean and you put your sleeves down at six o'clock or near enough six o'clock but they were right on you know a typical pair a mongrels that are sit in hiding somewhere to see if they could catch somebody
- 18:30 you know after six o'clock. That's the sort a blokes you had to put up with. So I remember that same bloke being on duty one night in the wet canteen. We had different zones in the forward area. The dark zone, the twilight zone where the lights are and the perimeter was the black zone. Nobody moved after dark, no speech no nothing. It's quiet. Then you have the twilight zone where things you know like were at a lesser level and then right in the middle of the camp well you know like
- 19:00 a bit of a canteen here and there. You know like and this bloke was on duty one night and somebody threw a can a beer at him and oh well it nearly knocked him out. Oh he was a proper mongrel. Good mechanic but that's as far as it went. He doesn't mix with any of us even now. You know like he's just bloody hopeless but that shows you how accidents can happen. To me it wouldn't a been an I would a been quite within my right to have done what I if it was the to happen. I'm glad it didn't don't get me wrong but
- 19:30 **And you mentioned you got shrapnel in your hand?**
- Yeah well then my hand was bleeding you know like with all this running around and well little scratches like that you don't greatly worried about and anyway subsequent x-rays showed that there was a bloody piece a steel in there. So that's my you can still see it here, my good luck mark. Could a been somewhere else. We had a couple a close calls. I know it's not bloody funny but we had the advance the all advance group were starting to rotate to go home. That must a been after about three months being there because the
- 20:00 twelve month tour and they'd already been there three months and when the mortars got into the lines itself sadly one of the captains had both his legs blown off but one bloke was ready to go home the following day and it's not very funny but when he when the stuff came to walk over he was bending over to pick up his shoes or whatever to get into some shelter and a piece a shrapnel hit him right in the buttocks. So he couldn't sit down to go home and
- 20:30 another bloke had a piece a shrapnel it's took the nipple off his breast clean just like somebody did with a razor. It was just like that. Another bloke when it happened he was rolled out of his stretcher and a great big bloody base of a mortar went straight through it and he wouldn't a been here today. Close calls and then it wandered in. You know like it got further. I don't know what happened down there, we had our own problems but Captain Payne he lost both his legs and that was a sad thing and I haven't seen him for quite awhile but he used to go to Anzac [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] Day and reunions in his wheelchair and the whole lot.

What happened to him? How'd he lose

His legs blown off.

- 21:00 Got hit with a mortar. One I think it was the one that hit the corner of one a the tents. You know like but I mean those things happen. Yeah, we did have our casualties down there but you know then the following day the attack that we expected never happened, it never occurred and we didn't really know why. Every time Brian used to go to an orders group, every day you got to go and listen to the latest and

the great he always used to come back you know, "We're surrounded by so many thousands

- 21:30 and all that." You know like to keep the fear a God into us and after awhile you just don't take any notice of him no more because half the time it just didn't happen you know what I mean. Fantasy land type a thing and well we did expect, at least I did expect an a full attack after it was a pretty good mortar attack and it never happened. So either a stuff up or whatever. You didn't stop and think you know as to whys and whens. So then the following day the word got around
- 22:00 oh pretty close, I think it was the following day, that the battalion was in strife in a place called Long Tan, which we faced Long Tan from our side of the perimeter pretty well. We couldn't hear it or see it. It was too far away for that but there was tracer and stuff going out all the time. Like night time every night you know like the it was a war zone. You know like and we knew that Long Tan wasn't exactly the place to be but it wasn't an involvement for
- 22:30 the engineers or anything at that time. The armoured went in, like the carriers went in but I mean other things you know like I mean they were here, there and everywhere and then the word trickled through that you know like that Long Tan was quite a battle. So the day after that, I'm near sure it was the day after that, one a the chopper jockeys was a friend a mine who was a recovery mechanic and saw the light and became a chopper jockey and quite often you know like whenever he
- 23:00 had a chance and we had the time you know I used to go up and take a few photos and all that and oh you know go for a run with him and Bob came in and he said, "Oh," you know he said, "I'm off to on this job at on Long Tan." I said, "Well," I said, "You got a minute?" I said, "I'll grab my camera. I'm comin' with ya." He says, "Yeah, alright but be quick." You know what I mean. It was all unauthorised technically but those things happen. So anyway I went in and we got to Long Tan. He had to do something
- 23:30 down there. Did whatever he had to do and on the way back I noticed some elephants and buffaloes being driven into the bush. You know like the chopper he flew was a little bubble and you know like I mean there's no reason to be there. So Bobby had spotted it pretty well as I did I think and anyway next thing he got onto the blower and he said, "Oh Jack," he said, "We're gonna be here for awhile." So up we went. You got had to be a certain height and then he became an observer
- 24:00 you know like bringing artillery fire in and all that. Whatever they do. So I actually flew an unauthorised mission as well. So when we came back we weren't gonna advertise the fact. You know what I mean because A I had no reason to be there and I didn't want to see Bob into trouble and yeah the Vietnamese actually from the battle were still around you know like in places.

So you're saying the battle had actually occurred at Long Tan

Yes, it did.

And this is the following day?

Yeah. There were still quite a lot of Vietnamese and all that in the area

- 24:30 and we were on a pretty high alert all the way through. You know like because a) we didn't really know where they got to. I mean it was a resounding victory for the Australians. I mean no matter which way you look at it they were outnumbered oh, I don't know about ten to one or something like that. We were only virtually a patrol. You know and they faced just about a whole bloody regiment and they knocked the hell out of 'em.

But did you I mean Long Tan is associated with sort of from the Australian point of view the big battle of Vietnam

That's, yeah.

Did you realise

- 25:00 At the time?

At Nui Dat at the time that was...

No. We knew that a quite a big event had taken place and in hindsight it was one of the bigger events because the people that survived it and the people that got killed they faced enormous odds in any man's language and they won the battle no matter which way you look at. So that well and truly you know like made it our day. As a matter of fact the Vietnamese put a banner across the road and I've got a part slide a that

- 25:30 and then I run out of bloody film of that particular banner they put up there. The South Vietnamese were very you know like very proud a the fact that we knocked the hell out of 'em at Long Tan and then we put up a bit of a monument down there. Actually it was in the on the crossroads of a rubber plantation. Our whole Nui Dat base was in a rubber plantation and we adopted after the war Long Tan as our day and the Korean blokes
- 26:00 got Kapyong, which was a tremendous big battle where the Korean blokes won tremendous these things and they got Kapyong Day. We got Long Tan Day. I think the armoured corps got you know like Waterloo

Day or some bloody thing. You find that each and every thing got a particular day that stands out amongst all others and Long Tan Day did for us. Yeah.

Before Long Tan actually came...

Mm.

Given the nature of the warfare

26:30 **being jungle warfare...**

Mm.

Were some of the troops getting frustrated that they weren't getting into constant engagements where it was...?

No, not really. I mean we were flat out from the day we got there building, laying mine like clearing tunnels. We were fully occupied down there don't get me wrong. As a matter of fact, no matter which way you look at it you were always understaffed and there's always an extra hour in the day if you wanted it. We were very busy. The ground that you owned in Vietnam was where your foot

27:00 stood. There was no land holding things you know, "This is ours and it's safe," or anywhere else. It's not but the road between Vung Tau and Nui Dat was quite interesting. Hoa Long village in the early days was quite an interesting place. We reckoned it was a rest centre for the North Vietnamese and you had to go through there in order to go to Vung Tau and every night there'd be fun and games down there.

Such as?

Fun and games? Oh you know like shots goin' off. People bein' shot and you know like we reckoned it was a rest centre for the North Vietnamese

27:30 as well. They you know like Australians seem to adapt. I mean the infantry had to travel around a fair bit. You know like on patrols and doing whatever they had to do but it never really involved all the engineers. If something got blown up we were in down there either repairing it, if it was a bridge or something. Mines had to be cleared away. The booby traps had to be sorted out. You know like well that was the job of the engineers and so we were pretty bloody busy and even if there was

28:00 a slack period there was plenty of stuff to be repaired. You know what I mean. So no matter which way you look at it, the water point took up a hell of a lot a time. That supplied the whole task force with water. One a the best water you could get. It was beautiful water and there was enough of it. That was a full time job to maintain that. That was done by the engineers but we repaired anything that well if it broke down you know like we fixed it. As a matter of fact we scrounged a couple of engines that did a better job and that great big rubber bladders that would hold, oh thousands

28:30 of gallons of they were actually designed for petrol but we had them full of water and anybody that needed water used to go down there like and pump it out and that comes to the story of the hot water system. The engineers built a great big laterine pit. That's where they dug out all the rubble to make roads with. Like road base and stuff like that and it takes a hell of a lot a water. So the decision was made to lay pipe works from the water point to the laterite pit rather than takin' trucks up and all that and of course they had to come past

29:00 our little w(UNCLEAR) and the pipe way is going one way, so we put an elbow in with a stop cock and the engineers are goin' one way and we went the other way and we laid on a shower system for ourselves. Got a photo of that down there. It was quite interesting because what it needed was a cold water tank and Tiny was a pretty handy sort of a bloke to have around on a few jobs and he built a burner for it.

29:30 The engineers built years and years ago a system known as a macklemaster [?]. It's a drum, twenty litres whatever size drum, and the knobs on it are laid in such a way you can't get water out unless you put water in. That's how it works and you build a fire under that. Hot water rises so you put cold water in and it pushes the hot water out and you could never have an empty drum and burn it out and we were workin' pretty well on that system but to get hot water we couldn't sit down there with blocks of wood and all that. So

30:00 we developed a burner, a pipe, fill it up with steel wool. You put the oxy torch under it 'til all the kerosene in it or in this case avgas, like aviation fuel, or whatever we could get bloody well hold of, not petrol, and you heat it up 'til it becomes gas and then you light it and then it perpetually you know it goes through the system. Turns into the gas by its own heat and that was funnelled into a drum, a great big the engineers had great big tanks for cold

30:30 water but it didn't like hot water all that much because half the time the water was close to boiling you know like and we were burning forty four gallons of fuel a day for the hot water system. It was a rather thirsty sort of a system but it worked. So we had to obtain something that could hold bloody hot water and here I still admire the Yanks. They had those things I said before they'd walk across the road aimlessly and you know just park themselves in the most unknown places. On one of the airports they were bringin'

- 31:00 in jet engines and they come in a container that's completely hermetically sealed. You know what I mean all of the, oh Jesus lined and you name it. I think that their containers were worth more than the jet engines that went in 'em. Anyway one of those finished up walkin' up this great big stand right where that fire of ours was and that became our hot water system. So then we had to develop a system where we could get warm water out. So we laid the pipes and we had about three or four races going. So you had to turn on the
- 31:30 hot water and the cold water. That run into a jam tin or a tin where it mixed it to the right consistency and then you could stand under and have a beautiful hot shower and it worked. Of course whenever we had showers and they wanted water at the laterite pit there used to be drops in pressure. So they always reckoned there were holes in the pipe and they'd be searching. They could never find any wet places anywhere where it was buried you know like and it took 'em quite a while to find out where the water went. So bein' cunning we made sure that the
- 32:00 brigadier had a good hot shower and very few people you know that mattered we made sure that they had a hot shower. That if anything was to happen they weren't gonna forego their shower and you know what I mean. Something could be worked out at a more sensible level. So Bobby Askew was one of the very few that was allowed to come and have a shower but he had to pay a price for that too. He had access to Saigon. He used to fly in there a fair bit and the Yanks had such a thing as Playboy. One Playboy magazine, one hot shower. That was the standard rate for Bobby
- 32:30 Askew. So whenever he come back from Saigon with a new girlie magazine he'd be flying over the showers firstly landing on the hot water tank you know what I mean in those little choppers. We were waiting for the magazine. Have a shower you know. That's the sort a thing 'til they found out of course that we were having hot showers and oh a few words were said and all that and then we worked out a system of certain hours of the day you know like we could continue with having a decent sort of a bath but this is to me really
- 33:00 what makes the Australian army what the Australian army really is all about. You know what I mean. They and I'm not saying this in any funny way or anything but our system was, particularly with the engineers, you work hard and you bloody play hard and when the shit hits the fan pardon my bloody French you all get your finger out and do the job you're supposed to be doing there and that's exactly what they did and to a man, including the national service. We only had one national serviceman with us in '66, '67 and I only found that
- 33:30 out two years ago.

Mm.

To me they were all soldiers.

Let me come in there

Mm.

And just ask about chaplains serving on Nui Dat. What are your memories of the chaplains there?

Well we had two. One was John Williams, an ex-infantry soldier. Saw the light. I think he had a bit a shrapnel in his head or whatever it was and he became a God botherer as we call 'em in the army and he was a fantastic bloke. Old John. He came into our neck of the woods one day and

- 34:00 bitterly complaining that he meet the nuns and there was a church in Baria, that's a big centre between the forward and the rear base and all that, and he couldn't understand English ah and they couldn't understand English, he didn't speak French and he didn't speak Vietnamese and he was a but he wanted to help 'em but he just couldn't make himself understood and somebody said he said, "You got troubles." He said, "Bloody Dutchman over there can't speak English either." So to cut a long story short you know like it came to talkin' to John and somebody said, "Oh," he said you know
- 34:30 "Bloody Dutchman'll teach anybody anything." You know like and I finished up more or less sayin' to John I said, "Oh, I'll have a go at it," like teach the nuns English. You know like, "I can speak I learned French at school." All I know is, "Oui Oui," and you know like, "Merci beaucoup." That's about as far as it goes my French and he cleared it with the great big white father that you know like I was gonna take on the nuns teachin' 'em English. So the first day we went to look the place over before I actually agreed to the whole lot.

So this, sorry is the

- 35:00 **orphanage is it?**

Yeah, this is the orphanage.

Okay.

So we took an a Vietnamese interpreter with us. There was John Williams, a couple a bodyguards. The Vietnamese interpreter. He was in the South Vietnamese army. We went down there, met the nuns. Being brought up very strict Catholic I mean I could virtually say the mass in Latin if you like bein' an altar boy and all that. That was no mysteries to me and I got on with the nuns alright. I felt a bit sorry for 'em really. A whole lot a kids down there you know what I mean and I

- 35:30 said to John I said, "I don't want that bloody interpreter." I said, "He's only gonna be a hindrance." I said, "I'll have a go at it," I said, "but I'm doin' it my way," because I had to learn to speak English the hard way myself. You know what I mean so to me it wasn't all that much of a great mystery. So it was decided I was gonna do one afternoon a week or whenever I had the time really because it wasn't me that didn't have the time. I always had to take bodyguards with me. Nobody travelled in Vietnam on their own because while you're drivin' a vehicle and anything happened you need somebody else to take care of you or you know like that's the way it was.
- 36:00 So to give the blokes a bit of a break the first time I went you know like the nuns had a cleaning girl, a woman that did all the cleaning up and we christened her straight away Sabrina. She was the tallest and slenderest girl I have ever seen in my life and she stood behind a broom all you could see was the moving broom. Like their people by nature are very tall but she was tall and slender. As flat as a board but that's all besides the board so immediately Sabrina and she loved being called
- 36:30 Sabrina. She never knew what it meant. So while I was teaching the nuns English the two blokes you know like stayed in the vicinity. They made 'em a cup a tea and all that or whatever and away we went. So then I noticed around the place that oh there were a lot a kids down there and they had nothing to play with and they had nothing this and it needed a few repairs jobs doin'. So I mentioned it to Brian one say and to Tiny. I said, "Look," I said you know I said, "how about we get a few blokes together. Come up one day and see what we can do." You know like give the blokes
- 37:00 a break and so that started off the workshop. Made 'em a couple a see saws and a couple a swings and all that and we laid a bit a concrete and the sad part of it was that in the pecking order in the Vietnamese culture teachers and doctors are stand very, very high in the pecking order and I was teacher to them and end of story. If I was giving 'em a hand doing anything in the playgrounds I didn't have my hat on they'd be racing out with a Vietnamese hat, "Teacher no, no, no. Sun." You know what I mean I couldn't get sun but never mind the other lot you know.
- 37:30 That was one a their things, always a bit of a joke and things worked out rather well. There was only one thing is that being very, very highly educated French educated they start to ask questions about the English language that I couldn't bloody well work out. Slaughter and laughter and all this sort a business. "How come you announce it like that, pronounce it like that?" You know, "You write it like that," and it you know like I said it had me bugged after awhile but anyway we managed. So coming back
- 38:00 teaching one day I was running a bit late for some reason or other and we don't like to be out on the road after dark or whatever. There's no point in that. So we just left the orphanage to go up to, that was in Baria, and there's a couple a Vietnamese out on the road, a couple a South Vietnamese soldiers. Well at least I thought they were. So and they were hitchin' a ride and anyway the fort where the Australian and the American advisers were in Hoa Long, that was just a village between the Baria and
- 38:30 our base, you know like they were manned with Vietnamese soldiers. So I
- I'll just hold you right there**
- Mm.
- On the South Vietnamese, which we'll pick up on the next tape**
- Mm.
- 'Cause we're right at the end.**

Tape 8

- 00:44 **Thank you so much Jack. So tell me more about your contact with the Vietnamese people through the convent.**
- Well John Williams was the Catholic padre down there and he was invited several times to say mass and this particular case,
- 01:00 I remember this really clearly, the idea was for him to say mass in this particular cathedral type a thing. Like a big church set up and to cut a long story short, John could only go if he could find a bodyguard to go and hold his hand and I said, "On your way John," you know like no problem. I cleared it and I went with John to do this job and away we went. We choppered in and anyway we couldn't say mass at the cathedral for the very
- 01:30 simple reason the Charlies were havin' a bit of a stouch down there with some South Vietnamese troop or American troops or whatever it was but the Yank chopper that we used was on a job so it they the intention was to drop us off, John was gonna say mass and then they were gonna pick us up. So we had to unfortunately stay in that particular situation and we got to the village and John apparently had been there before because he seemed to know the head man there

- 02:00 and anyway he said to me he said, "Well Jack," he said, "I don't think we'll be saying mass down here," and he said, "We're gonna have lunch with the local chief of police," or the local chief. I think he was the local chief of police at the same time. He was only a little bloke and he was apparently a pretty tough little fella and he said, "Now," I said, "Now a few words of wisdom." I said, "I know what you're bloody well like." I said, "They most probably will offer you a beer and it'll be a cold beer and whatever you do, respect it for what it is."
- 02:30 I said, "Yeah oh right John." You know, "You don't have to go to all that trouble." So anyway to cut a long story short we went to the chief's police and he had his wife and kids down there. They made us most welcome you know what I mean and anyway inevitably the beer was brought on. A great big glass of beer and it had ice cubes floatin' in the top. We like cold beer. You know what it's like in Australia. If somebody would even dare put an ice cubes in a beer and that's what John was referring to because the normal thing to do was just flip 'em out and throw 'em out and he said, "You bloody well don't do that." So
- 03:00 anyway that was a nice beer too. There were two kinds a beer in Vietnam. There was and a French type a beer and it came in big bottles, and just as well it was that, and the local beer also came in small bottles known as Barmey Bar and any Vietnamese bloke'll know Barmey Bar. To us it was embalming fluid. Two mouths full of that and you were ready for the undertaker. Oh God it was a horrible bloody brew. So we drunk the beer and we had lunch down there. Like they made us a salad mainly and all that and I said to John on the way back when the chopper picked us up
- 03:30 I said, "What's all this bloody fuss with the ice cubes?" Apparently they knew we were coming and the women had gone down a day or so before to another village where they had a ice making machine and they started off with a full ice block but they kept wrappin' it up in banana leaves and all that to make sure that the Australian guests that were coming had a cold beer, hence they were quite big ice blocks but that's just what they were. You know what I mean. Just melted down ice block. That's the extent the
- 04:00 local people would go through to make you feel at home once they knew who you were. I think that by and large the Australians were pretty well respected all right through Vietnam because we treated the Vietnamese for what they were. Just Vietnamese people. That doesn't say you trust 'em all the bloody way. You can't because they all look the same whether they're from the North or the South or anything else but there was no reason there to be suspicious of anything and you know like you're on your guard all the time. I'm not saying that you know like to be relaxed
- 04:30 in any way but that those little things really meant that you know like that the people did care about us and I felt a bit sad about that because we had an occasion of going back into a village that the civil affairs people got involved in through workin' with John and all of that. It also involved me collecting food from the kitchens on a weekly basis, get that into the orphanage and all that and I worked there unofficially with civil affairs.
- 05:00 You know like because they had things to do and all that and I remember one night to make up the numbers they were gonna show a movie in the middle a nowhere and we did and it meant having to spend the night there and I'm not all that keen on hammocks and my only fear of Christ is rats. That's my phobia and of course Vietnamese villages are overrun with bloody rats and I spent the whole night sitting in a hammock with a loaded bloody gun keepin' the bloody rats away but after the movie was finished it was rather funny because wherever
- 05:30 the audience sat in those villages there were all little puddles of water and little heaps. Whenever they had the urge of nature coming they did it wherever they stood and it must have been quite a thing if they had a long carnival or something. It would a been quite an experience. That stood out but also we found out during that there from the people that the local pump had broken down. So I arranged a working party. We choppered in down there to fix up the pump and all it really needed is take it off its base and turn it a different way and it nearly
- 06:00 started World War 6 because for so many centuries the pump had pointed that way and that's the way they wanted it. That it did work didn't really all that matter that much. The way we turned it, it did work. They didn't want it. It was away from the tradition and all that and anyway we worked it all out because nobody could converse with 'em in any way with sign language and we put it back the way it was and oh we got it workin' to some extent but one unpleasant thing happened. The women were in the meantime drawing water out of a well
- 06:30 and they were doing that with a great big rope and running away and somebody got a camera out and took a photo and they just let the rope go and all that. You know what I mean it was a definite no-no but anyway that was all done in pure innocence and all that. We smoothed out all that sort of thing over and just got 'em a new rope. You know like but that's the sort a thing that we had to be careful of and another thing we had to be very, very careful of Vietnamese kids don't drink milk. After they're weaned they're off milk. Their digestive system can't take milk
- 07:00 but we didn't know that and I didn't know this. We had access to a hell of a lot of long life milk. The Yanks had it in great big tins and to take that into the orphanage they didn't know what to do with it. The kids wouldn't drink it. So I came up with this marvellous bloody idea. We had an ice block making machine. So I got food dye like cochineal, whatever it is, and all that and made ice blocks out of it. You know like just freeze the ice in different colours and you know what I mean and the kids, oh they loved it. Not because it was milk, because it was green, red or purple or whatever the case may
- 07:30 be and apparently that caused quite a bit of an upset to their digestive system. Now this was all done in

pure innocence trying to you know like get 'em you know like to eat that type a food. Some a the food that they wouldn't eat and the Australians wouldn't eat it either. We were on American rations and sauerkraut wasn't in those days on very high on our menu and the you know the Yanks didn't I liked it because it was part and parcel of the Dutch cuisine. So sauerkraut was around pretty well. Another thing we had to be careful

- 08:00 with the food that the not too much food would go out of the hands of the orphanage and could find their way into the wrong system because I remember one case where we captured I don't know how many tonne a rice and it was interesting. It all had 'Hands Across the Ocean' aid on the bags and we destroyed it because it was captured in the field and the words back from here it had to go to the population and had to be this and had to be that oh you know what I mean. The by that time
- 08:30 the underground movement against Australians in Vietnam had well and truly started off and anything we captured more or less had to go back to the locals. So we did that in one case and we did mark the bags and it was captured back within a week. So different means had to be found to keep that sort a stuff out of the hands then politics started to come in on it but I mean that's something you can easily fix. I've got solutions for a lot of things. They may not be very
- 09:00 nice and it may not be adopted by mankind but you just don't capture the stuff. You just I mean what are ya gonna do? I mean that's keepin' those people alive that you're trying to damn well do something about. We just made sure that whenever you handed food out or something that was only done in quantities that they could handle without makin' a an issue out of it. So that had to be you know like taken care of a little bit

Just

But we never had trouble with the orphanage to my knowledge. The nuns we could never supply 'em with

- 09:30 enough food for the very simple reason they looked at you know quite a large number of kids. So they were cookin' it and for us to do for them to do something in return for us hence we got the pig for Christmas. They had a great big oven and another thing is unofficially whenever I could get a bag of flour or something they used to make us French sticks and fresh bread in Vietnam, oooh curl your mo on that one you know. So every so often I could sneak a couple a French sticks into the mess you know what I mean for a bit of a bite but eating local food
- 10:00 by and large was a definite no-no because cases have been known where food was poisoned and all that and you know like it more or less affected the Americans more than the Australians but you don't want to find out a mistake had been made and some a the stuff you saw in the market places unless it was fresh food you wouldn't want to eat anyway but the nuns whenever I got down there they always put on something to eat and they were French cooks and believe me, the minute they knew I was very fond of crabs because we were right in the middle of prawn and crab country the way
- 10:30 they did crabs oh God Jesus you could make a pig out of yourself. It was beautifully cooked and all that. So they only had to see me and somebody was cookin' this crab stuff up. You know like I don't know how they did it but it was absolutely beautiful.

What order were the nuns?

Black and white. They wore a white dress with a black cape or a black dress and a white I honestly to me I thought they might a been Francisc... no, Franciscan are brown.

Dominican maybe.

Dominican. Yeah, Dom... very close I've got a photo there. You might be able to

- 11:00 pick it. I think they could a been Dominican.

What were the risks associated with...

Going to the

Father John celebrating mass in a convent there?

Unless he had a bodyguard it was a no-no. Well I was onto this before. I picked up two Vietnamese soldiers coming out from one teaching afternoon and I was driving and my Owen gun was in such a way that either I or my

- 11:30 offsider could grab it and he had a rifle ready to go and I had a bloke in the back with his rifle ready to go and I had a 9 mil pistol in such a way that I could get my hands on it instantaneously. We had no doors on the vehicles. We had a steel picket up the front in case they had wire across the road so they don't take your head off. That used to snap it off first and we picked up those two Vietnamese. I asked the blokes first if they had any objections. You know they said, "Oh no." They looked innocent enough so we picked 'em up and we hit the village a Hoa Long where their camp was but
- 12:00 during the trip they kept saying, "Bookoo VC [Viet Cong]," and they kept pointing to the guns and 'Bookoo' means plenty and 'VC' is Charlies and we thought they were makin' fun of us being pretty well armed. So when we hit Hoa Long it didn't dawn on us straight away but the minute we got through Hoa

Long there's a great big road block across the road that the Americans they had an American unit down there and they were on full alert. "Where'd you come from? What happened?" I told him. You know I wondered what the hell was goin' on. The whole village was overtaken by North

- 12:30 Vietnamese. There was a whole regiment. Those two blokes we picked up may or may not have been South Vietnamese at all. You know it could a been anybody. You know like you know I'm laughin' at it now. It wasn't funny at the time because we would a been that close to gettin' your throat cut. There's no way we could a done anything but then I remembered in hindsight there were no kids in the village. There were no buffaloes. It was close to tea time so you could say, "Oh," you know, "They could be havin' dinner," but the whole place was on you know like ready to blow up. So
- 13:00 when we got back to our own lines you know like they went through the same bloody story and they weren't impressed and Brian immediately stopped us from having anything to do with the orphanage and all that and blah blah this and blah blah that and anyway John had a few words with the big white chief and we were back to normal pretty quick that would a been very close. Shortly afterwards I went into the villa where the Australian adviser and the American were staying to find out what it was all about. Yeah they were
- 13:30 on a full alert. They were just ready to go. That's shots were fired a fair bit, not when I was there but during the night and all that and he said to me he said, "This is what happens Jack," and he's pointing out from where we're sitting and there on the ground, the Vietnamese manned their post with their wives and family. If they go in a war situation the whole family goes with them and then when shots were being fired the women light the guns and all that and we don't understand 'em and he said, "See that bloke over there?" I said, "Yeah," and you could see him havin' a smoke
- 14:00 but his paces were measured. He was pacing the joint up and I said, "Well jeez one a your bloody Charlies." He said, "That's right." He said, "But we know who he is." He said, "We put him to sleep somebody else will take his place and then we don't know who he is." The situation was rather intricate you know what I mean. You in some cases if you knew who your enemy was you let 'em go for so long. The minute anything happens half a dozen trusted blokes'd be standing behind him. If he did the wrong thing well he didn't quite... wasn't quite
- 14:30 gonna make it but they reckoned you were better off living with the devil you knew in situations like that and you know like that was quite an experience because you just didn't realise that that sort a thing went on. You know what I mean if you knew 'em well why put up with 'em but we never allowed Vietnamese onto a base and the minute they did well things changed. The rear camp had Vietnamese working down there and there was a mate a mine that had to vet 'em and all that and I don't believe in that system. Look at it in bloody
- 15:00 Iraq now. The minute you mix 'em all in you don't know who's what, why or when. I don't give a damn how you put it, you don't know. I mean I trusted the nuns exactly as far as I could see ya. You know I mean if you did it any other way I wouldn't be here now sitting. That was a stupid mistake in a way to pick up those two blokes but at the time, in hindsight everybody is an expert. I mostly probably would have done it again because I couldn't see anything wrong. They didn't pose a threat. In a way I think they saved our lives
- 15:30 for bringin' 'em you know like not that that would a meant any difference. They could a been South Vietnamese blokes, I don't know, but the minute they remember being saying, "Bookoo VC, bookoo VC," I thought, "Jesus that means plenty of VC." It wasn't the guns. They knew they were there but anyway we can only live and hope that that you know we never get the full story and stuff like that but John was quite in a few situations where you know like he could be in a bit a bother. At one case
- 16:00 we went to this American post on invitation. It was Brian and I went and I'm not quite sure whether it was through John or something or somebody he knew but anyway we went. We choppered in down there and that was an American forward post and the whole camp was surrounded with pansy pits. That is you know like that the they put in, the Americans put in and all that and we were invited there down to a luncheon and that was quite an experience. 'Cause nobody could speak Vietnamese and they couldn't speak English too well and
- 16:30 they put on a stew and the stew had a beautiful pink colour with the spices they put in but when you looked in the spew, spew nearly said it, you pick it all up and you know like you just help yourself and there's human hands floating in it. That was monkey and when you take the skin off a monkey that just looks like humans you know what I mean and I thought, "Christ almighty they're gonna turn me into a cannibal," you know but actually it was quite nice but that was monkey that we were eating but it just looked like you were turning yourself into a cannibal. You know like
- 17:00 and Brian upset a bit. He didn't have quite as strong a stomach as I had apparently and anyway I quite enjoyed it and the Vietnamese down there you know a grin on their face. "Yeah, yeah," you know what I mean. Nobody could talk to 'em, right? I couldn't talk to 'em. I just didn't understand the language. The American that was there you know like he thought it was all a great big joke. He thought we were gonna knock it back but I really enjoyed it. A week later that camp was wiped off the face of the earth, no longer there. That gone done over and end to that.
- 17:30 They'd been hit quite a few times and I got one photo, one slide there with Brian in front of a vehicle that had a mortar bomb goin' straight through the bonnet of this truck. You know like the it was fun and games but you don't go out lookin' for it. Half the time you got there either the day after or the day

before or you know but there's chances where you could have been there at the same time. John travelled around and I travelled with him a fair bit, as I say, as his bodyguard. He knew I wasn't a great believer in

- 18:00 the system. He never bothered me with it. One incident was in the mess. One night we were havin' a few beers and there were some Americans there. One bloke got a letter from home and in there was a set a rosary beads and he said to me he said, "You know much about this Jack?" I said, "No oddly enough." I said, "What's your problem?" He said, "I don't know whether they've been blessed," you know. I said, "Oh," I said, "that's not a bloody problem." I said, "You see that little bloke over there pourin' beer on himself and tellin' dirty jokes?" I said, "He's our God botherer." "Oh," he said, "I can't go." Oh God Jesus he was terrified to go and see
- 18:30 in the American system you got to put in a six month application form you know like to make an appointment but our blokes you just different story. So I just walked over to John, tapped him on the shoulder. I said, "John," I said, "you got a customer." That's exactly what I said you know like and anyway brought the Yank over and I let John went out with the bloke. They did whatever they have to do and the Yank was most impressed that he was blessed and all that and John just went back had another beer and like nothing happened. That's the difference between our system and
- 19:00 their system. That's the difference in John being what he is, a bloody good bloke all the way around, or a pencil pusher. Oh he was ex 'cause he knew the system. We had a replacement or somebody. There was another denomination and this was a rather sad thing too. Brian come up to me one day. He said, "Right Jack." He said, "The whole camp m(UNCLEAR) their parade and take 'em all to this great big bloody tent up in headquarters." I said, "What the bloody hell for?" He said, "Oh you'll find out when you get there." "Alright." So I
- 19:30 lined everybody up. Stopped work and we walk in there and there's a hell of a lot a people down there and here is this chaplain was gonna have a church service. Now I'm the I think the only and first Australian soldier ever to have on his dog tags, "NR." No religion. I've still got 'em hangin' up in my room down there and when he started off I said, "Excuse me." I said, "Is this a church service?" and he said, "Oh yes." I said, "Well," I said, "I'd like to be excused. They got no right to do that." "Oh," he said, "well anybody else
- 20:00 feels the same way?" and half the bloody congregation got up and walked out. You know so when I got back did Brian had a piece out of him. You know I said, "Look don't ever pull that bloody stunt again pal," you know what I mean. I said, "I don't like churches. I don't want anything to do with it." I said, "Don't ever put me in a situation and think it's nasty," but that time on the radio that you know I, "Oh bloody Dutchman at it again," and a few days later we had a break down in the camp and I was there
- 20:30 with the wrecker and we had to pull a truck out and the roads when they're wet they're just like driving on grease and we got a steel rope from the wrecker through this truck trying to pull the wagon out and here comes that same padre on a little motor bike that he had. All over the place you know like slither in the mud and we're trying to stop him and he's waving back and all that and he hit that rope and he made a few somersaults and by the time we got to him the language that came out a that bloke even made me blush. You know like and I couldn't you know and I said, "Jesus if that's the way
- 21:00 to the boss," you know what I mean I said, "How 'bout washing your mouth out with soap." You know what I mean. Oh God talk about hypocrites but anyway he was a nice bloke and anyway you know so much for that episode. I told John about that later and he had a big grin on his face. He said, "Oh," he said, "we all look upon the Lord in a different way." I said, "Yeah well if I meet him," I said, "at least I'm lucky." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I got an accent." He said, "What does that mean?" I said, "Well when I knock on the door and I have done a few times John," I said, "Peter first thing he asks
- 21:30 me 'Where are you from?' and I tell him I'm Scottish." He said, "What difference does that make?" I said, "He told me he won't make porridge for one. So he always sends me back. So keep that in mind. If you want a long life, when you get down there tell 'em you're Scottish and 'I'm too bloody lazy to shovel coal'." So you know like and he could accept that.

Just on that issue of just religion, just so I can...

Mm.

...clarify it

Mm.

Was it an issue of that there were risks everywhere...

Yes.

...that you

22:00 **experienced it?**

Yes.

Or was it that there were risks associated with being politically aligned to a church? Like for instance that the nuns might have been...

Well you were you could be. I mean the more you did for the population the more they tried to get rid of ya, the like the Charlies. I mean we flew a little pennant, "Win hearts and minds to (UNCLEAR)," pennant. Oh I flew one for a while down there. They reckoned it was a good thing and all that. It never greatly worried about. Never give it a great lot a thought but it was an accepted fact, A the ground

- 22:30 you stood on is what ya owned and God knows what land that was. Don't trust anyone. Never travel on your own unless it was really a safe area and I've still got to find a safe area that was safe where you could well and truly relax. That was one of the bad the down sides of Vietnam is that no matter where you were, you were always in a risk area. Some areas of greater risk than less. So you never switched off really. You couldn't afford to. I never took R&C [Rest and Care/Rest in Country], which is
- 23:00 recreation in country. I didn't need it because whenever I wanted to go somewhere in my job I just went. I didn't particularly like the idea of going under rules and regulations you know what I mean on top of all the garbage. I never needed it but when I went for R&R [Rest and Recreation] that was I went to Singapore for a week with Tiny and I we had a ball. It was really good because it there is where you really could switch off but in country for the time you set in foot in Vietnam in war days the risks were there
- 23:30 and believe me, at some places more than others and it's just how you react to it. I always reckon you got to die of something. That doesn't say ya go out lookin' for it but on the same token if you're gonna shut yourself up all the time you know like you just won't get very far but besides that we were far too busy most a the time to really start worryin' about things like that and people start to shoot at ya. They did on one occasion. Brian saw fit to sack Tiny over some incident and he said to me he said, "Righto tomorrow morning," he said, "you're
- 24:00 taking me up to Vung Tau." He said you know, "Like I'm gonna have a talk with the big chief," and he wasn't all too bloody happy and I said, "Yeah, righto." You know like I didn't take a great lot a notice of him. I mean so when I got the wagon out and all that and we'd just left camp and Brian said to me he said, "Jesus, you're bloody quiet Jack." The minute I don't talk they reckon I'm sick. So I said, "Yeah," I said, "and before you start anything," I said, "I'm on Tiny's side." "You're sacked as well," you know what I mean. "When I get down
- 24:30 there I'll find a bloody replacement." He wasn't he was a pretty upset bloke over something. So anyway we're running along down there and I think by that time we'd bypassed Hoa Long because the engineers put a road in to stay out a that village. There was always problems down there and anyway shooting started behind us and the drill is pull over and start World War 6. You know what I mean. There was blokes that I knew that could do the job. I may or may not have pulled over but seeing it was behind me I just dropped it down a few cogs, put my bloody
- 25:00 foot down and it just went off. You know what I mean. I wasn't gonna start a shooting war with the idiots I had with me and besides that you don't go lookin' for trouble if you can get out of it. So I took off and here's Brian sayin' you know what I mean, "Pull over," and all that. I said, "I'm drivin' this bloody thing and you sacked me anyway." I said, "I'm not taking any notice of you. I'm off." So we head to Vung Tau and, "You wait in the bloody vehicle." "Yeah I'll bloody wait here," you know like and anyway he had a long talk with the boss and all that and he came back rather
- 25:30 disappointed and he said, "(UNCLEAR)". I said, "What did the boss say?" He said, "Oh," he said, "I can't sack warrant officers and sergeants in the field," and he said, "and he's not gonna do it either." He said, "He knows you two. I said 'What hope have I got?'," He was only a captain you know like. I said, "Oh Brian," I said, "don't take that to bloody heart." I said you know I said, "There was no malice in it." You know he said, "Just," you know, "Just one a those things." We I took it as a joke anyway but that was the only unpleasantness we actually really had 'til he found out you know like that he hit me with the
- 26:00 takin' the patrols out with guns and all that but I mean that's just stupid incidents really but Brian he came up through the ranks and he was a fantastic bloke. I still he's pretty crook now. I think it's generally a matter of time and there'll be another bloody funeral but that's neither here nor there either. He's a pretty crook bloke but he really was convinced that he was gonna bring everybody back in one piece and that's the best way and the only hope he could do this. You know what I mean and I think he was a little bit over
- 26:30 fussy, a bit over protective but when the in hindsight and all that that bloody darn sight worse blokes around than Brian you know. He did his best but he had the whole world upon him being up through the ranks, particularly the first time in the field job. You know like he wasn't gonna run the risk. He retired as a major and yeah, just one a those things but he got cancer pretty bad and he had that
- 27:00 for quite awhile and most of the blokes have gone with cancer. You know you

That's interesting.

Yeah, Agent Orange and all that. You can blame it for that. We were sprayed quite regularly I mean but I reckon if they have it why haven't I got it? Why haven't the others got it? I mean...

'Cause you ate monkey.

Yeah I ate mon... that might a been a now, here's a thing.

Mm. An antidote.

Oh God.

Just kidding.

Jesus.

Um just as a slight this may be a difficult question to answer

Mm.

But you seem like quite an independent almost

27:30 **bit of a rebel kind of a character**

Mm.

In spite of the fact that you've joined an the army.

Mm.

Were there any unauthorised missions or things that you kind of did outside of the system that you haven't told us that you can think of?

Well we kidnapped a well actually I was part of it. Tiny got wind that one of his mates, he was up through the ranks, a captain, was on his way

28:00 to Vietnam to go to Botonia [?]. He was a Botonian bloke and he said to me, "Jesus Jack I'm gonna play a joke on this bloke." He said, "What we do, we go up to the airport where he lands." I said, "I drive and you become the committee to pick him up," you know what I mean. I didn't know the bloke. So anyway Tiny pointed him out to me and you know I went over and I said, "Oh Captain," whatever his name was. You know what I mean I said, "Follow me please. I've got me wagon over there," and anyway he had all

28:30 the papers for the whole draft and the whole aircraft with him. So anyway we put him in the jeep and I said, "Driver advance," you know what I mean and anyway we took him to one of the pubs in Vung Tau and we got him that bloody pissed that he couldn't walk and we spent the whole night in town you know what I mean havin' a bloody ball and all that and my God Jesus we didn't know he had all the papers for the whole bloody draft. He went he was sent missing and then well he found out it was Tiny you know what I mean, he knew them, and but that was an

29:00 unauthorised bloody mission because we captured kidnapped this bloody bloke and he got in an awful lot of trouble. So did we for that matter. Not me, I was the innocent bystander. The yeah like hell. Yeah, it just I mean those things happen but to go out on fighting patrols. We had a few blokes that went out on jobs that they shouldn't a been on. Sometimes you'd it'd happen accidentally. Nobody went out looking for things. See this is one of the things. You might be a rebel. You might be a little bit unorthodox on some of the things you're doing

29:30 but there were limits, don't get me wrong. If it meant going too far overboard, A in my position I couldn't afford to do it. Another thing was I had enough brains not to do it. If the chance and the occasion arose or something I always looked at it from the point if action had to be taken I'd damn well take it. Never mind you know like the like the paperwork comes later type a thing and it never went against me in my whole army career.

30:00 The it after Vietnam I put two of the biggest exercises Australia ever had on the ground. K2 [Kangaroo - name of exercise] was up in North Queensland was the biggest exercise Australia ever put on and I put that on the ground. After that Australia started to think of defending itself and they put on an exercise, Black Buffalo, and I put that on the ground. I was the 2IC [Second In Command] to the camp comedian, oh camp commandant whatever normally you call 'em camp comedians but putting K2 on the ground

30:30 it took me twelve months. I got crew as I needed 'em from any unit in Australia. I could pick 'em, hand pick 'em and I earnt out a that a associate fellowship with the Australian Institute of Management. My responsibility was from drawing pins to complete hospitals to get that set up and set that headquarters up. I wielded a tremendous amount of power. If I wanted to fly to Brisbane all I have to do is put an entry in the system and

31:00 a black Mercedes Benz pick me up from home, take me to the airport and you know like. As a matter of fact on one trip, authorised, I took my wife with me and that created one of the biggest hassles of all times. I've got, now I don't know whether I can go into the humorous side a this. I had to go to Brisbane to sort out some paper work and I go up to Emu Park where the headquarters were being set up and through Vietnam and all experience that's how I got into that job and

31:30 I looked the place over and all that and I had to go back and quite a lot a people had to go down to liaise the ground and what have you and anyway I said to my boss I said, "Look," I said, "I'm," I said, "How 'bout I can put my wife on the same itinerary and take her with me. I'll pay for it," which I did because she was very highly cleared in the public service. One of the highest clearance and I had to be cleared the same way because you can't live with somebody unless you've got very high security clearances. So there was no problem down there and she took a bit a time off.

- 32:00 We went up to Brisbane, did what I had to do. I we flew into Mackay and from there a wagon picked us up and we did what I have to do down there and coming back, I like gardens and I'm very fond of garden, gardening and we went to the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane and I found a few seeds and a few cuttings and all that, which I put in my bag to take home and grow you know what I mean. Prior to that a week before, and I should a woken up to this, I travel in
- 32:30 civvies in those days. Brisbane airport I got something put in the back of my back. "Don't turn around. Keep going straight ahead. No funnies, no this," and you know I'm, "What the bloody hell has happened?" you know what I mean and anyway one of my old army buddies retired from the army as a security chief at Brisbane airport and he saw me travelling through and he wondered what the hell was going on and I told him you know like and he thought, "Oh well I'll play a joke on Jack." So coming back the following week, forgotten all about bloody Alan.
- 33:00 Hit Brisbane. There's a big security check on. The biggest security check they had at Brisbane airport forever and I thought, "Holy Jesus Christ." I said, "Here I am with all these cuttings and all those seeds from the Botanical Gardens." I thought, "Jackie boy's gone," and the next thing this security lady came over, "Mrs Vandam would you step this way please," and I was bookin' the seats at that time you know like to get the seats and they walked her into the waiting area. They made her a cup a tea and they gave her a biscuit and they made such a fuss of her that I wondered what the hell's goin'
- 33:30 on. The next thing a security bloke come over, "Oh Sergeant Major Vandam come this way," and the same thing for me and here was colonel my colonel they're going through his bag. Socks, underpants and the whole lot and they're checkin' him out. There was an air commodore. There was some very high ranking the whole plane was just about full of very high ranking service personnel and they're goin' through the whole bloody lot and they made such a fuss out of Gil and myself you know like oh it was bloody you know like unheard of. So
- 34:00 anyway we got on the airport. Their we were ushered in our seats. "Would you like the window seat?" Oh they made such a fuss, it stood out you know what I mean and I thought, "Jesus, Alan you bastard," you know what I mean. I knew something was wrong. So the plane takes off and my boss came over and he said to me he said, "You bloody Dutchman." He said, "I know you bloody sergeant majors run the whole bloody army but I wasn't aware that you run ANA [Australian National Airways] and TAA [Trans Australian Airways] as well." Oh he was absolutely bloody livid you know
- 34:30 like. So a week later when I had to come back to go through there I went straight into the Alan's office and I said, "You bastard," and he had a big grin on his face. He said, "Oh Jesus Jack," I said, "How did that go?" I said, "What do you mean?" you know. He said, "Oh I was that worried." I said, "I've never met your wife before and I thought you might have been travelling with your girlfriend," you know I said, "When I've introduced as Mrs Vandam." You know what I mean. I said, "Yeah that's minor bloody problems. What made you do it?" He said, "I've been in the army Jack for twenty three years and all those bums have given me a
- 35:00 bloody hard time and this is the first time I've ever really had the chance to pay 'em back. So I put on a bloody good security and like underpants goin' everywhere and I couldn't resist makin' a fuss," you know like. I said, "Yeah. So much a that," but you know like Jesus if that ever gets out holy bloody hell I've seen some blokes that are gonna be absolutely bloody oh commodores and every like very high ranking navy, army and air force. It was one a those tri [service] things but that's the sort a thing see that's
- 35:30 typical Australian army and that's what I like about the whole system. You do your job, you do it well, you can get away with murder up to a point. You know what I mean and you all stick with one another.

Just on that issue that you mentioned just before the... you said that you could never relax in Vietnam. That there was always...

You never relax.

A feeling of being unsafe?

Yep.

Were there any things that you observed about how Vietnam was impacting on the other soldiers that were going out on missions which may have been

36:00 **different to the types of things that you were doing but may have affected them?**

A lot of 'em started to drink a bit more than others and a lot you know like yeah, it's a hard thing to put a thing on. A lot a people most probably thought you know what I mean that things may not turn out as well as it should but then again look, you're all young. You're all trained and we were very well trained. So a lot of 'em you could say were

36:30 in a position to you know like, "A job's got to be done let's do it the best way we can," and the reason I'm saying it like that is just before we went to Vietnam we started to get the first national service kids in with us and we put a questionnaire around, "What do you think of national service?" and all that and to a man all the way down, "We're in the system now. Try and stop us. We'll do the best we can," and they bloody well did. It took me, as I say, up 'til two years ago to find out which in our group was a national service kid. The engineers had a few and to us they were just other soldiers

- 37:00 and they did their job the same as everybody else without anybody knowing but there is always a difference with people that are naturally more capable than others with coping with very hard situation. I mean if you see somebody blown to bits you know what I mean even the best and the hardened stomachs will turn. I'd been through it as a kid in Holland. I mean not that I enjoyed it sort a thing but it didn't come all that much of a surprise. I'd been shot at before and I'm not saying this in any way but
- 37:30 the mean is I knew what it was all about and even today I will not sit in any restaurant with my back against windows or anything like that. I always find a place where I can see my way in, my way out and to me it's just part of life. I've been brought up in it. Other people I feel honestly weren't as lucky if you can call it luck. You know like and particularly if you hold a job of responsibility like Brian had you know what I mean. I mean a wrong decision from him

- 38:00 you know what I mean. He had the life of a lot of people in his hands and then if I took a patrol out or whoever took a patrol out you had the life of those people in your hands and it's just a matter of how you handle that and you could cope with it yourself. I coped with it in Vietnam really well and in my time out of Vietnam but a few years ago I had a very bad nervous break down. Everything just came to a head and I snapped and that was the end of that. I

Would you say that any of that was because of Vietnam?

I think it was contributing to that, yes definitely. The you never get the full cause

- 38:30 of it. I mean head shrinkers to me are just an evil necessity but on the same token I've got out of it alright. I it's just one of those things.

Could you pinpoint just so we can just get an idea

Mm.

In Vietnam what would you say might have contributed to a feeling of tension or

Not being able to switch off. See this is one of the things that, look at it from this point of view. When the Second World War finished, the when they came out of the Middle East or wherever they came from they were

- 39:00 aboard ship. They all stayed together as a group and they switched off as a group. I've seen kids pulled out of the bloody jungle, put on a plane, they were home two days later in an atmosphere where their own family kicked 'em out a the bloody house. You know with all this, "Save the bomb," and all this bullshit. Now nobody with a clear mind can cope with that for very long and I feel sorry for those kids, I honestly do. Mainly because that's a situation we've never experienced before. It never should have damn well happened and I've got absolutely no time for that sort a behaviour.
- 39:30 I've made statements like this in public before and I'll make it again. I'll fight for this country to the end but not for half the people that live in it and that's not my sentiments, that's quite a few people that feel exactly the same way and, as I say, if some people can cope with it a hell of a lot easier. Some people are more motivated perhaps I honestly don't know the personally I think a lot's got to do with personal leadership as well. If people got confidence in ya you can
- 40:00 get a lot a things done. If people haven't got confidence in ya they just don't want to follow you. I've never had a problem. If I've wanted needed people even in peacetime and all that you know I've said, "Righto. This has got to be done," you know what I mean and go and do it. You don't think about what's gonna happen. If you do that I think you turn yourself into a nutcase pretty bloody quick.

Do you want to hold that thought?

Mm.

We're right at the end of this tape. We'll just pick it up...

Tape 9

- 00:40 **So just in terms of things like observations that you were explaining before about the troops and how they might have been handling the situation in Vietnam are there any other sort of indications of tension or trauma that they may have been experiencing there that might have**
- 01:00 **manifested itself?**

No, one of the things was that seeing that you'd lived there for twelve months under constant threat, let's put it that way, you never really had a chance to switch off and I honestly think that in order to switch off on the way going home you switched off from one extreme and you came to Australia in another extreme. Not wanted, paint thrown at you, called a murderer you name it. You know all that sort of thing and I don't think that that was the sort of thing that a hell of the lot of the Australians expected nor should have been subjected to.

- 01:30 To me it was all aided and abetted by the local Labor Party and what have you because all the ones that

did the most got the best jobs when they came into power and I make no bones about that. We did a job, as we were paid to do, and that included the national service kids. The thing is that grog was easily obtainable and I think that a hell of a lot of young kids got into the grog a bit. More than likely that more than they should have. I have never seen drugs in

02:00 Vietnam at all amongst the Americans and the Australians and the reason I can say that is, with my trading post experience and all that and me travelling around it was never offered to me. I have never seen any evidence of it. I've never heard through the grapevine of any evidence of it. Grog being, as I say, Johnny Walker Black a dollar ten a bottle if you could get it with sergeants and officers had access. I've still got my PX [Postal Exchange -American canteen unit] card here. You have so many litres per month and all that and then when our own canteen system opened up you know like

02:30 I mean that you could get plenty of that. The opportunity of becoming an alcoholic was quite simple. It's just that I've never been attracted to grog. Oh I've had drinks and all that and I've been tiddly a few times but I ... the grog never's been a problem with me at all at any time.

You mentioned just before...

Mm.

That before you went...

Mm.

When you were evaluating Vietnam that you'd fight any war for Australia...?

Yep.

But not for half...

For the country. For the country but not for

03:00 half the country. Not for half the people that live in it.

Can you just, just as a

Yes.

So we can get an idea of what it was like

Well

Before you went to Vietnam

Mm.

What did you think this war was about?

We believed that we were to go and fight in Vietnam to stop communism. End of story. That's what really what we believed. That was what we were led to believe and I've got no reason not to believe it. They by that time I knew a fair bit of world history and all that and I read about the Vietnamese involvement with the French and all

03:30 that from 1945 onwards and stuff like that and I thought, "Well rather than fighting those people here on your own home ground let's go and do it somewhere else." I don't like communism and anti-communists, end of story there. So if we could do it overseas, I was a paid soldier to do a job that I was paid to do. Whether you do it in Australia, outside Australia that's what I was paid to do and I'd do it again if I had to sign up again. I would not serve under the Labor Party situation. That's one of the reasons I retired

04:00 as well but I was that close to retirement I didn't go out any earlier and I'm on record of saying that in quite a few places. So that's neither here nor there either. The thing is that when you do a job and I think that I did a job pretty well. I did a hell of a lot for the local population there with the nuns. Teaching them English. I've got stuff sent over from Australia for the kids and I stuff like that. I communicated with them. Jesus I've

04:30 organised stuff for them to build huts and a lot of other people a lot of Australians did that. Organised food parcel and that and then to come home by a mob of shit wits who, that's a very polite way of putting it, to be branded a murderer and a kid raper and all that stuff like that. You know like that cut me pretty bloody deep and all aided and abetted by a very good bloody Labor Party. Jim Cairns when he was alive was sitting on Anzac Day with his arms around North Vietnamese here in

05:00 Sydney welcoming the heroes of North Vietnam while we were still losing people in Vietnam and it was all accepted by the Australian population, or the ones that were all sitting on the side of the bloody road in the gutters where they should still be in my opinion. That sort of thing put me very bitter against a good slice of the Australian population. Not only me and I think that as a professional I had to take that as being part and parcel of the job but when you take a national service kid that was dragged into a situation like that and I know of cases where

05:30 they were kicked out of their own homes because he shouldn't a been there and all that, that sort of

garbage, then I think you draw the odds a little bit too far. Another thing that I'm that was one of the contributing factors there was that in the regular army you still went back into the system. You didn't switch off completely and national service kids in a lot of cases didn't have that opportunity. They were just switched off. Another thing was the divorce rate amongst the Vietnamese veterans

- 06:00 is very, very high and so is the alcoholism rate. Having a good wife behind me I reckon that was another contributing factor that you keep sanity. I know so many of my mates that the minute they come home they finished up in broken home situations and all that. They were all brainwashed you know what I mean. Murderers and all this sort of stuff and it got a complete wrong idea and then you see Rambos and all this sort a garbage on TVs and that puts an image in a hell of a lot of people you know to give 'em the wrong idea of what went on.
- 06:30 It was a dirty job. It was a lousy job. Somebody had to do it and as far as I know, we did it the best way we could under the lousy circumstances we had and we expected really a little bit more recognition when we came to Australia. Now things have changed. There are votes in it and God knows what they think they might do for you now. I've got a lot of time for DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs]. I've got very little time for the RSL [Returned and Services League]. They only accepted the Vietnam veterans in 1987 as soldiers and
- 07:00 now there's a big thing going you can impersonate soldiers like veterans providing you do it behind a manner but you can't do it by wearing somebody else's ribbons. I'm fighting that at the moment through with the RSL. It's got a really got a feather in my cap this one and the RSL has fervently wiped me on it. Toukley last year was the Long Tan commemoration day and we always turn up there for years. John Williams is there as the padre, or was,
- 07:30 and we turned up. National service people. We had people from interstate you know. We just come there in a group. For the last few years people with a black beret and multiple hat badges started to march and they were all national service people that never went anywhere. The non-combatant arm of the national service and this or last year they turned up in Toukley behind a great big banner and on this banner was they were veterans of Korea, Montebello I don't know if we were ever at war with Montebello,
- 08:00 Vietnam, Malaya, New Guinea and it listed all the place and anyway we saw that and even the national service kids there put their eyes up. So I made a mistake. I wandered over to I thought who was the leader and I said, "What's all this garbage?" and he just threw his hands in the air and he said, "We only representative," and all that and by that time we started to march off and they were all pretty appalled, the real veterans were. So when the ceremony took place there at the retirement
- 08:30 village that bloke I spoke to was taking photos, okay. Then in the afternoon he was there at the function. They bring all the old entertainers down you know what I mean. It's a good thing. They were there, all those non-combatants, all posing and passin' themselves off as real bloody veterans and then now he's on a walking stick, you know what I mean. So I wrote a very, very nice letter, I got it all here, to the RSL in Toukley what I thought of that.
- 09:00 Put it in to tried to put it in to The Valley, the newspaper. They wouldn't even print it. I wrote a letter to the national service association that marching on by permission is one thing but to pass yourself off behind a banner and all that was just takin' it a step too bloody far and I didn't write a very nice letter, believe me. The RSL in Toukley handed that letter straight to their branch. They didn't even bother reading it. So the RSL wiped me on that one. The two letters that I got back from those two people. First of all they called me a liar that I didn't speak to anybody
- 09:30 and I got eighty blokes standing there watching it you know like they didn't even have the guts to you know like to own up to the fact that I did try to talk about it because they said, "Why do you condemn us without talkin' about it first?" I tried to do that. Anyway they didn't know who they were talking to so I wrote a letter back and stated my rank, name, number and my situation. My experience and all that and to that day I've never got anything back. So I've then wrote a letter to headquarters RSL finding out the legality of
- 10:00 banners on marches and all that and they wrote me back a very nice letter. So I sent them every bit of information I had. I said, "Now explain that one away," and they fervently more or less they wiped me on that one. So the bottom line is, you can't impersonate a soldier a veteran by wearing his medals but behind a banner you can do and put on a banner whatever you like. Any-non veteran providing you're a member of the RSL, and they can all become members of the RSL, can march on Anzac Day and put on a banner whatever they like. It's not an RSL problem. It's a community problem. I don't know who you see in the community. Just the typical
- 10:30 white wash job. I'm still a member of the RSL but I don't support them in any way. The thing is now, the group of Vietnam veterans that I go with in Toukley for every year no longer wish to go to Toukley to go to all day. I won't go if they bloody well put me there in a wheelchair because we are completely taken over by non-combatants that are now trying thirty years after the war to cash in on something they never were and they were veteran soldiers but
- 11:00 now for the sake of membership or political correctness, you call it what you like, they're quite entitled to do so. I'm fighting it with every ounce of bloody blood I got in me because

So it's not a gesture of support?

Hm?

It's not a gesture of support for veterans?

Well we don't need support. They sat on their arses here when we were doin' the bloody job. For whatever reason they had for not going. My own brother was one a them and he bloody never got out of Gosford but now, you know what I mean. 'Booh'

11:30 the flag all the oh you know he's the great big bloody hero you bloody name it you know and there's now you go on Anzac Day there's about four or five battalions of 'em marching now, not one of them is a veteran because the veteran national service veterans that are veterans march with all their units they were part and parcel of and they're no different to any other veteran because, as I say, I found out one of my own blokes was a bloody national serviceman two years ago. The minute somebody wears uniform they're part and parcel of the family,

12:00 particularly if you're Vietnam vet. You know like I know people before and after and half the time I don't know knew 'em whether they were or not. I've been told that I'm wasting my time and I put that in writing to the RSL and they said, "Oh yes. Even your own mates said you're wasting your time." Yeah because I don't get support from the RSL. They even took that out of context. I've got all the letters here.

So

I'm now taking this up to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and I'm writing a copy to both. Also the Opposition, because if you send a letter to one person it never get there. The mail will

12:30 lose it but if you send it to a few people, see they don't know who's gonna do what, why and when. That's what I learnt in the army too. If you wanna get the message across never ever ever send it to one person or one department. Send it to a few of them. Whether you send it or not doesn't matter but in the bottom, "Copy to." See they don't know who's gonna take action. They got to do something because if they don't somebody else may or may not do this. See that's an old trick of the trade.

Just on that issue

It works.

Of community divisions.

Mm.

How can

13:00 **you describe how the community was how the Australian community was divided about Vietnam?**

Yes. Quite easily. If they had any family that were in the system or had been soldiers and all that, they backed you but if you weren't you know like I've been stopped on the road. I remember one I came home from Vietnam. My wife will deny this but it did happen. My little kid had just gone to school and he said, "Geez, Dad you're a murderer." I said, "Oh yeah," you know, "what's for tea?" So anyway his school teacher was one of those long haired arseholes

13:30 that you know was an anti-war bloke and anybody who'd been to Vietnam, and that was at Ingleburn School. So needless to say I went to the school had a few words to the speak to that they shifted him but there were quite another few soldiers that had kids coming home exactly the same way. Now here was your teachers' mob expressin' opinions in to kids and it's not very nice you know to have that sort of thing happening to you. You know like it's not the sort of thing that I'm very proud of even to have 'em

14:00 to bring up but that gave me an impression of the Australian public that's not very, very nice. On the other hand, I remember takin' my kids to the museum in Sydney one day and there was a whole classroom with kids down there and I don't know whether their teacher knew me or not and he came over to me and he said, "Look we're very very proud a ya," and I thought, "Christ all bloody mighty. You go from one extreme to the next," and this really happened. This is not a fantasy tale. They either backed you every way or they were against it. The people

14:30 that were against you were all the brainwashed bloody yahoos that you've got in every society and every bloody year. You've got 'em now. They haven't got a clue what they're talking about. They haven't got a clue what's going on but they got an opinion. I really blame the Opposition. The a lot to do with the Labor Party for that for the very simple reason they were in a position they stoked the whole population up to stir up as much as they could against the Australian soldiers and when it, well even Yurine [Uren] and Geetshalt [?]. They were kicked out of the RSL

15:00 for being communists and they've become the patrons of the Vietnam veterans association of all people. I went over there to fight the bastards, so why accept them here? That's why I'm not a member of any of this sort a garbage. I got very strong beliefs and very strong feelings on things and that is one of the things I don't mind my putting my life on the line for a cause I believe in and that's not being a patriot or anything like that. If I commit myself to something I go the whole way. Never mind doin' it half way. I

don't make a serious

- 15:30 bloody life out of it. I take life, as I say, as it comes. I know one thing. The minute I was born I'm gonna snuff it at some stage of the game and it's gonna happen to all of us. So why do it with any difficulties? It's just a philosophy I've got and I've lived with for a long, long time but I don't like to be taken for granted and I don't like to have to take the mickey out of me by a bunch of yahoos that are all living on the cream of the country at my expense because their only reason they can do that is because people like me are willing to put their life on the line.

When you came back from

- 16:00 **Vietnam had your thoughts about the Australian public's...**

Only when I came back and during back.

...division, did you actually think there was any that they had a point about any of their things about passivism and their comments about the war?

The thing is, whether they had a point or not is totally irrelevant. We are Australians. We were told by the governor of the day to do a job and we did it. To take it out on the soldiers is what I was against. If you want to take out a dispute or something, take it out of the management but leave the soldiers alone

- 16:30 and they took it out on the soldiers. Look I've got so many mates that got broken homes and stuff like that through that attitude. I know of cases where their wives were actually active demonstrators. Now what sort of a situation are you gonna come when you come home? Those blokes were stressed up already to the point you know what I mean. From one fighting condition on a Friday and then a situation like that two days after. They never switched off. They snapped. They either took to the grog or they just walked out and they're not isolated
- 17:00 cases. No, this is the sad part of the war. For the rest nobody I can't think of any bloke in my whole career that enjoys wars. I don't either. I don't think that a fireman enjoys going to a fire and having to rescue people. It's a lousy job that's got to be done. A policeman in a lot of cases. It's just a nurse, a doctor. I mean you've got to make decisions. You've got to be in a situation. You either do it or you don't. You're being paid to do it. To me if you start thinkin' of the
- 17:30 conscience and all the other stuff like that well you've lost the plot.

Just

I don't enjoy it, don't get me wrong, but that's the way it is.

You were regular army.

Yep.

What are your thoughts on conscription for Vietnam?

Totally against it because I'm a volunteer myself. I don't really think, a bit hard to say I'm totally against conscription. If really it came to a point where the country was in a direct threat then everybody, everybody,

- 18:00 never mind this lottery garbage, everybody should be called up and do their bit. Men, women, child I don't give a damn if it's got to be done get it done but to draw people's name out of a hat you know like and that sort of garbage no I'm not I can't honestly say in all honesty that I'm in favour of that sort of system but I'm not against conscription providing everybody has a go. In Holland conscription down there whether you've got six legs, two legs or no legs, you are due you do your time
- 18:30 and whether you like it or not at least everybody is in the same boat and if you don't like it then vote that particular government out but all governments believe in the same thing. That was in my time. So but this lottery crap but then again, when we put the questionnaire around at the engineers just before we went to Vietnam, "What do you think about it," and all that, to to a man they all put down, "We're in the system now. Try and stop us. We'll do our best." 'Til your good Australian public and the Labor Party turned that attitude against their own people
- 19:00 and that's the way I feel. Not only me. That is a deep running feeling by a hell of a lot of early vets. The latter ones you know like, well I can't speak for them but that was a feeling down there. We never made any distinction whether you're national service or whether you're (UNCLEAR) it we had to come into that situation. We were there first and when it did happen well I wasn't very proud to be an Australian. I could I used to travel to Sydney from Ingleburn by train. Always the same train, always the same people.
- 19:30 I in civvies people come and sit next to me. When I was in uniform there was always a spare seat next to me and they knew you. I knew the people. You know, why for God's sake. You know what I mean. That was the system they had drummed into 'em. You know what I mean. Oh you're sitting next to a bloody child molester and you're sitting next to some sort of a bloody murderer but then again also, Vietnamese North Vietnamese women and South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese kids were just as capable of killing Americans

- 20:00 and Australians as anybody else. That's the part that's forgotten and the media, I really blame for a hell of a lot of things because all the decisions that the media could drag up out of the mud was all made in some bar in Tudor Street in bloody Saigon and it just wrote in all sort a bloody garbage. Most of them were that whacked out with alcohol they wouldn't know what they were writing but if they could knock the Australians in any way that's the first thing they did. They did, I really mean that, because for some reason they were all communist backed and they lost the war with the French
- 20:30 in Vietnam and also lost it here for us. The Australian army didn't lose no bloody war. It was the damn media and the politicians of the time. Too gutless to make any decisions to do anything to stand up for their own rights. I know I get a bit emotionally involved with this but that's a very deep feeling with me. I've been sold out by that particular political party. Oh I'm not being I've well and truly I've done guest speaking spots on it and I'm well and truly on record. I've even involved
- 21:00 myself in politics. I've thought if you put your money where your mouth is. I'm quite prepared to do that.

So did the war change you in any way?

Yes. I'm a damn sight more aggressive to believe in what I believe in. Oh yeah. I've honestly believe that the only way to get on in this country i.e. to mind your own peace and let the world slide by and if you're willing to have a go at something, stick to what you believe in and that's exactly what I'm doing. I honestly got no opinion on Iraq. I think we're going the wrong way about it

- 21:30 but if we had to go there for whatever reason we're there now, do the best of it. Timor, exactly the same thing. The I know quite a lot of people that went that came back like some of the older hands that were still in the army when all that started. The look, war is a very dirty business. It is and if everybody thought, "Let's not have one," then you're just run over by the people that are quite likely willing to have one. If you want to live under
- 22:00 a situation like Hussein and all that and total depression then so be it. I don't like to live like that. I honestly don't and I'm willing to do something about it and I've got an idea that it's only a matter of time and we're gonna find the crunch here in Australia too. We've made some very, very bad mistakes here. Some really bad mistakes and it's gonna get a damn sight worse before it's gonna get better but the trouble is, if I really give my opinion there I'm immediately classed as a bloody racist and a and an extremist and I've quite often said it, I'm old enough now it's only
- 22:30 a few years and I'm gone anyway. Let somebody else sort it out. That's how I feel. That's not only me. There's quite a few of us. Like it mainly because politicians unfortunately get you into a situation that they haven't got the guts to sort out and they're quite willing to put somebody else in to sort it out for 'em. I'm not against John Howard. I reckon he's doin' the right thing. Whether he's misled or not I'm not in the least bit interested in that. The thing is this, we are committed. Now get the show on the road and do something about it and that's what is being done
- 23:00 but I don't think that the threat is from overseas. The threat's already in Australia. All the garbage that is willing to have a go only live here. They're already here.

One final question.

Mm.

Thank you by the way for all that you've just said.

But that's how I feel.

No, it's really good stuff. Emu bobbing.

Yeah.

You didn't tell us what it was.

Well you know what emus do when they go walkabout. They pick everything up that they see laying around

- 23:30 and the army got an expression if you want to keep the area you live in clean you go for an emu bob. Pick up cigarette papers and cigarette ends and everything else and I thought it meant going to the toilet because when I was whenever somebody said, "Oh I'm going for an emu bob," they disappeared to do their emu bobbing and I thought they actually went to the toilet. So when I was in the middle of nowhere I had to go to the toilet and I thought you know like learnin' to speak a the English you know what I mean and, "I'm goin' for an emu bob," and they got no idea what the bloody hell I was gettin' at. As to why you know when we're in the middle of the bush
- 24:00 I wanted to go for an emu bob. Oh Jesus I mean but it see that's the sort a thing that I really admire in the system. They ought to have a shot at you for doing that and saying that but I could never see any bloody malice in this. I don't know why all those ethnics today are so obsessed with the idea that they're being made fun of. I mean okay, you're different. You've got a different culture but what the hell are you coming here for? I came here to be an Australian and I reckon I'm a bloody

- 24:30 more Australian than half the Australians and I make no bones about that. I don't wanna be a Dutchman. If I did I can go back down there and remain one. They most probably wouldn't want me back anyway. I got no desire to go back but I can't understand the new flock of people that come here. The first thing they do is they want to change the whole world for their benefit. What the bloody hell are they doing here? If they don't like it, if they're short of two bob
- 25:00 I'll give 'em four bob. They can take one a their mates with 'em. Get rid of 'em. I mean what did the hell are you coming here for? I got no intentions of changing my culture, which is an Australian culture, to suit somebody that comes here. I mean if I've got to get my photo taken I've got to show my face. If a Muslim woman got to take a photo taken she can put a bloody veil on. Why bother takin' a photo? You don't know who the bloody hell it is. Whether it's male, female or anything. Now we can't sing
- 25:30 Christmas carols at our schools because we might offend some bloody Muslim. I don't give a honestly I don't particularly care. If they don't like it, we were here first. Buzz 'em off. That's not only my sentiment. Talk to anybody. They'll tell you exactly the same thing. Why the hell should we change what we are to suit a mob of what? I've got nothing against those people, I haven't, but don't come here and change my way of life.
- 26:00 That's one thing I won't I won't stand for it and a hell of a lot of people here won't stand for it and I can go overseas to stop that sort of thing I'll be on the next boat to do so.

Anything that you want to add to the interview today by the way? Just as a last wrap up?

Mm. I'm glad you actually came. I got a few things off my chest. I hope that I can contribute to somebody writing stories about this. If at any stage of the game I can elaborate on any of that I'm only too pleased to do so. I've got a lot of slides here and I've got a lot of photos

- 26:30 Yeah I've been an education to me and if I've upset anyone by my views they come from here. That's how I feel. That's how it is and I make no apologies for it. If I swore at any stage of the game, yeah well sorry about that. No malice. No hard feelings and I honestly appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

I haven't had a chance to get this done, believe me. As my wife would say, "He's easy to get but you can't get rid of him."

Thank you very much

- 27:00 **Jack. I really appreciate it.**

Ah really I've really enjoyed this.

Thank

But I can get off the on the subject a little bit.

No it was great. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS