

Australians at War Film Archive

Alan Williams - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Thank you for joining us today. We just want to start with a brief introduction of yourself, from where you were born?**

Well I was born in Adelaide, actually in Cheltenham, 13th June 1940, educated in Adelaide, brought up in Adelaide,

01:00 enlisted in the army in Adelaide, schooling – secondary schooling at Adelaide High School for the last four years, matriculated, that's basically it.

When did you enlist in the army?

August 1958, but prior to that I had done the National Service, the six year National Service scheme. I volunteered for that instead of going to recruit training – called

01:30 'canny'.

And when you enlisted, where did you go from there?

I went to the School of Signals at Balcombe, did courses there and I was posted to 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, and from there volunteered for SAS [Special Air Service] and over to the

02:00 west and on from there.

And when were you posted to Vietnam?

Oh well, the first time was May 1966.

And in what capacity was that?

That was with the SAS, Special Air Service Regiment, 3 Squadron was the first squadron there, and I went back in 1969 with the training team and [was] seconded to the Special Forces Regiment.

02:30 **When did you leave the army?**

June 1982. Yeah, June '82.

What did you do when you left the army?

Well I was head hunted out of the army I went into the – working for the Liberal Party working as their campaign organiser, operations

03:00 manager, for 10 years until I got sick and tired and decided to retire when my daughter got married and I have been retired since.

Great. Thank you. We'll go back now to your childhood, if we may. You were brought up in Cheltenham?

No. During the war I lived at West Croydon, I was only born at Cheltenham. My father was in the army.

03:30 I went to Croydon Primary School until Year 6, or Grade 6, and then I contracted polio and I was out of school for 18 months, I was in bed. I did the 7 [Year 7] at the start of first year tertiary, secondary, sorry, by correspondence. When I got out of that

04:00 I started, went to Adelaide High School, went through to 4th Year, matriculation.

So how long were you doing correspondence for your education?

About 18 months.

And how was the transition from being isolated and doing correspondence and going into

high school?

I really can't remember to tell you the truth, too long ago, but I didn't have any problems, I never had any transitional problems in anything I have done, I have just gone from one thing to the

04:30 other, army to civilian life, never worried me.

What do you remember about Croydon Park Primary?

Not a hell of a lot to tell you the truth: playing cricket, being put up before the deputy headmaster to get the cuts at one stage. I'll never forget that because there was three of us had been caught for something, I can't remember what it was, and had to get

05:00 three on each hand, you know the old cane, and the other two started blubbering away, and I wouldn't cry and he looked at me said, "Didn't I hurt you?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well why aren't you crying?" and I said, "I am not going to." He said, "Put your hand out again." So the first hit on the second hand I started crying, I am not stupid, but, if anything, that put me off corporal punishment in schools. I am not against corporal punishment per se

05:30 but when you get someone who hits a kid to make him, you cry, that's - to me that's wrong. Anyway, my homily for the day.

And who were your mates at Croydon Park Primary?

Oh God. A bloke called Ian McKenzie comes to mind, he's still in Adelaide, he's a dentist.

06:00 I can't really remember any more to tell you the truth.

Do you remember what you used to get up to?

Yeah, a lot of mischief I know that. I wasn't a perfect angel.

And what did you constitute as mischief?

Oh, shooting through, yabbing or whatever. We used to go down to a place called Shillabeer's Paddock,

06:30 there's a milkman down there had horses. When the horses weren't being used we'd ride the horses until he'd come out and chase us off, typical boy stuff.

You mentioned your father was in the army. Where did he serve?

He was with the 2/4th Independent Company, I am not sure where he served with them, he finished up in Curtin's Cowboys which was the Northern Territory Observation Force.

07:00 You know them? They were the Unit formed in the Northern Territory, specifically to guard the coastline and they covered right around from Derby right through Arnhem Land and small patrols on horse back, whatever they had, they spent the remainder of the war there. But where he was before that - my father and I never talked about his service.

He made no mention of WW2 or ...?

No.

What do you

07:30 **remember about WW2?**

Ration cards. About the only thing really. I mean I was only born in 1940, I was only a babe. But I remember - just after the war we were still on rationing for certain things, but apart from that I really don't know.

What sort of food would you get with a ration card?

Meat, bread, about all I can remember. I don't think we had rationing for milk,

08:00 if we did, I can't remember. Those were the days of course when milk was delivered in the old billy can, well before your time.

Do you recall any blackouts?

No. I don't think we had any, not in Adelaide. If we did, I can't remember, I was too young.

What was your mother doing whilst your father was away at the war?

Looking after

08:30 me, my brother and my sister. I have a brother and a sister, were both born after the war, there's 8.5 and 10 years' difference between us. She was at home. She may have had another job, I really can't remember, I was only four or five, I don't really remember what happened, people tell me, but I can't.

Can you remember your dad coming back from the war?

No.

09:00 No, I don't.

What did he do when he came back?

He went back to – he was at John Martins, he went back there, he was a – I think in those days what they called a floor walker – you know, I imagine. He worked there all his life, finished up as a director of John Martins.

09:30 **How would you describe your father's character?**

Oh, I have never thought of it, we never really got on very well to be perfectly honest, I suppose we were very much alike. He was a very intelligent man, had a fair bit of drive, he wouldn't have [achieved his position at John Martins] if he hadn't.

10:00 Very personable, played a lot of sport. He played footpath for South Adelaide, which I did later. He played district tennis, pennant tennis, district cricket, a bit of an all-round athlete, played golf a lot, in fact to the extent – I can't remember him having a sick day but he just dropped dead of a heart [attack] at 56, I think it

10:30 was, I was away. But no, he was a pretty accomplished character.

Was he a strict father?

Firm, but strict, no. I can't remember when I was really young, but when I was a teenager I was always out playing

11:00 sport. The only time I really saw my father was at breakfast because I would come home from rowing training and he'd be out somewhere, or Mum and Dad out, so we didn't really have a lot to do with each other. I know it sounds silly, but life was so full doing other things, I was always at rowing training or football training or playing tennis. Yeah.

What about your mother, how would you describe her character?

11:30 Very firm – lovely lady. Not a – a pretty average I would say in a lot of respects, a good mother, certainly a good mother. Again, a very bright woman. She never worked, apart from being a

12:00 housewife. I was born, I mean that was a job in itself. No she was very nice. Still is. She's 89.

Do you remember the meals she used to cook, the food that was on your table?

Well yes, and that's, I suppose that's one thing about my father, he – I wouldn't say

12:30 my father was a snob, that's not the word, but he had a fine appreciation of what you should eat and what you shouldn't eat and where you should go and who you should associate with. In the old days we'd never have offal on the table but always steak or chops, or roasts or that sort of thing, he wouldn't have anything else. Mum was pretty good at that. One thing that does come to mind

13:00 is coming home from rowing training one night, and I walked in the back door and the whole ceiling was completely covered in red goo, with stalagmites, and she tried cooking, for the first time, strawberry jam or plum jam in the pressure cooker and it blew and it was everywhere. It was the most revolting sight I have ever seen in my life. She never cooked – used the pressure cooker after that. I think it was the second time she had used it, never again.

13:30 Lovely lady, always willing to help a neighbour.

And who were your neighbours?

Well, when we were at West Croydon, and I left there when I was – lived with a chap called Charlie Henderson who had Adelaide Boiler Cleaner

14:00 which was the only one in South Australia, he made a fortune out of it, used to clean all the boilers out in the wineries, breweries, all that sort of stuff. And old Charlie, Uncle Charlie, he was never actually related, but we lived with him during the war while my father was away. We stayed there for a while after until we built a house over on the highway, Anzac Highway. Yeah. Bungys across the road and the Fooeys next door, I remember them. We were

14:30 very happy neighbours around there. We had the Hallet home around the corner, the brick people. Yeah, it was a good time.

So where would you say was the family home then?

Well we didn't have a family home as such, we were staying with Charlie Henderson, who was a widower, and his brother had been killed in the First World War, the Light Horse.

15:00 Until we built the house over Anzac Highway, at what is Plympton now, Plympton was then Kurralta Park then became Plympton, that was the family home then. Then my parents were divorced in, dunno, I was away, my father built a place at Novar Gardens, and my mother took over the house at

15:30 Plympton. So I suppose Plympton, in those days, was the family home.

Can you describe that home that father built?

Average three-bedroom suburban home, easy as that, War Service loan. I always remember a comment to him, we used to go to a lot of his contemporaries' homes on the weekends playing tennis, they had tennis

16:00 courts and they all lived in big apartments or houses, and I said to him one day, being rather naïve, "Why do we live in a house like this size and they all live in big houses?" and he just looked at me, "We own ours." I have never forgotten that. But he's right I think the rest of them were making a lot of money, but they owed a lot of money too. 'We own ours,'

16:30 a lot of wisdom in that.

So a three-bedroom house. I am guessing you shared with your brother, shared a bedroom?

Yeah, but only for a short while. Bearing in mind that when I was - when he was - hang on, I was 18 when I went into the army and at that stage he was only eight, so it wasn't for very long.

So what is the age difference between your brother and yourself?

I am -

17:00 about 10 years between my brother and I and about 8.5 between my sister and myself, so myself, sister and then my brother. Somebody asked me what they were like when they were growing up. I said I don't really know, I didn't have much to do with them. I know that sounds silly in a family, but the age was so different. They'd only just started school, 2nd Year and 3rd Year, when I

17:30 went into the army. I suppose it's - I don't know whether that is normal or not, siblings not having anything to do with them. I love them and all that sort - but in those days I didn't have a lot to do with them. I had my interests and they had theirs.

And what were your interests?

Mmmm?

What were your interests?

Sport, sport, sport and reading, I read everything.

18:00 Doesn't matter what it is, I'll pick it up and read it. I go into the - I use the local library, I would get an average of 10 or 12 books a week, I read a book about that thick overnight. I was sports mad in those days. I used to row, played football, I played football for South Adelaide before I went into the army. Didn't play cricket, didn't like cricket at all. Athletics,

18:30 I was a lot slimmer and a lot fitter in those days, played tennis, played a lot of tennis.

Who did you row for?

I rowed for Adelaide Rowing Club and then Torrens Rowing Club in Adelaide. Then when I went to Melbourne I rowed with the Yarra Yarra. When I went to Sydney I rowed with Mosman, when I went to Perth I rowed with Perth Rowing Club, West Perth Rowing Club.

19:00 **Where did the interest in rowing come from?**

I don't really know, just got me, something I always wanted to do.

And South Adelaide Football Club, how did that start?

Well I have - I played football at school and was asked if I would go out and play for South Adelaide, which I did. This was senior comps [competitions], I wasn't old enough for anything else. And we went

19:30 out, I played a couple of games and we went out for training one night, and we were called over after the training and told we couldn't play for Souths any more. There was myself and a chap called, he was a South Australian, Johnny Cahill, bloke called Bruce Petty and a bloke called Fred Bloch. Turned out we weren't in the South Adelaide zone. I had to go and play for West Adelaide,

20:00 Petty and Bloch had to play for North and Cahill had to play for Port. Cahill certainly did very well. Freddie Bloch played for North Adelaide in state football, Bruce Petty didn't. But I spat the dummy and thought, 'I will just concentrate on rowing,' so I didn't play any more. That was the days when you didn't have - if your father played a team, you could play for them irrespective of whatever area you were in. That came

20:30 in later, Jack Cahill and my father both played in the same team before the war, premiers team. But

everything changes, fact of life.

So when you started at Adelaide High, what were your first impressions of high school?

I enjoyed it. Adelaide High was

- 21:00 a very, very good school. Firstly you had to be in the top three of your class, of your previous school, to get in there. You had to do an entrance exam to get accepted. It was the only non-private school that competed in the inter collegiate arena other than the colleges, so it was very good. It had probably the best teachers you could get in South Australia
- 21:30 that weren't in private schools. No, I enjoyed it, plus the fact there was a lot of sport being played there. I rowed there, played tennis there, football, school cadets. No, I enjoyed it.

What subjects did you enjoy the most?

I, probably because I read so much, I really enjoyed English, enjoyed writing, not that I ever

- 22:00 tried to write anything, I never had a problem with writing. It came in handy in the army when it came to staff officer. Mathematics I don't mind. Hated languages, I had to do - I gave French away, when I did the matriculation I found I needed a second language, and I thought I didn't want to do French and the teacher said - he showed me a German
- 22:30 newspaper and he said, "Can you read that?" I said, "I can't read German." If you have a look at German you can get the gist of it because there are so many words alike. So I said, "Well do you recommend German?" He said, "Well if you are very good in English you would probably pick up German reasonably," wouldn't find that as hard as the others, because some people find German hard. So I did four years' German in one year. Just scraped
- 23:00 through but that's all I had to do of course to get the - it was - everything I do it seemed they changed the parameters, the ball game, I mean the year before you didn't need two languages to matriculate. You had to the year I did it. Anyhow, I got through.

Who were your favourite teachers?

A chap

- 23:30 called Hopper, he looked very much like Raymond Burr, you know the actor, he had been - he was a bit of my idol in those days, he played football for Glenelg and he was a real big bloke and wouldn't take any shenanigans, he had the best throw with the duster that I have ever seen in my life. He could hit a chap in the back row sitting down with accuracy. Very good. No, he was good.
- 24:00 A chap called Sheehan, he was the OC [Officer Commanding] of cadets who was the - and Phil Reid, the sports master. They are only about the ones I can remember.

What did Mr Hopper teach?

Maths and general science, physics, no, maths and physics. And the other one of course was

- 24:30 art, I enjoyed art, I love art. I enjoyed it.

Where did the passion for reading come from?

I don't know. I have just always read. No that's not right, I probably picked it up when I had polio. When you are lying in bed, there's a lot of time and you can only do so much correspondence school, and we used to have a lending library come round,

- 25:00 mobile, Mum would go out and get me books from that. But what did eventuate from that is, without me knowing or realising, I just started a form of speed reading. I don't read a page line by line, I just look at a page and absorb it. People say, "You haven't read that," and I say, "Well, ask me what's on there," and I can tell them, which come in very handy when I went to school.
- 25:30 I never did any homework, never had to because I could remember it all from the text books, very handy habit to have.

That time when you had polio would have been quite difficult, how old were you?

I don't know, Grade 7 at school, so I would have been about 11 I suppose, 10 or 11.

Do you

- 26:00 **remember contracting it, do you remember ...?**

Do you want to know what I remember about having polio? I remember being in a bed that could be wheeled down the road. My mother used to wheel me down to the shops in this bed. This may sound very strange, but I remember women, ladies coming up to me and, "Poor boy," and slip me two shillings. I made more money out of lying in a bed than I did anywhere else. That - and I

- 26:30 remember with great affection, I had a physiotherapist, a woman that used to come down to the house

three days a week, and I would do physio there, with her, and then I would go up to the hospital two days a week and do physio there, and I lost track of her, and I contribute it to her that I am like I am now, to her, because everybody

27:00 I went up the hospital with, I think there was only two of us came out of it OK, the rest of them had callipers or short leg or some disfigurement. I lost track of her because she went over to France to live for a while, and it was only about two years ago a friend of mine who is a physiotherapist here, Craig Mitchell, he was a member of the club, he was a Vietnam veteran, we were talking about

27:30 physiotherapists and I mentioned this woman, and he said, "She's just come back." She was his lecturer in physiotherapy at the university. So we arranged to get together and I had her in here for dinner, as a 'thank you' dinner. Mind, rather belated, it was 40 years after the event, or 50 years after the event, but never forget her.

What do you

28:00 **remember about the treatment that she gave you?**

Well it's pretty - I mean at that stage you would lie on the dining room table with your front over the edge and you would have to lift yourself up level. When your muscles are wasted, that takes a bit of doing. I am pretty sure that at the end of it I had muscles hanging out of muscles, so it did me some good I suppose. The only

28:30 thing, I was in a frame from the waist down lying in bed. What had happened, because I would lie in bed on the side a bit, reading, I twisted my spine, so then they put me in a full body brace, so I was lying - but again it was one of those things that you accepted, you just

29:00 do what you have to do. No good moaning about it, it doesn't help anything.

Did your mates visit you when you were ...?

No, they weren't allowed. After a while the chap across the road, David Bungy, who had had polio himself and he was a bit older than I and his legs were completely buckled, and he used to come over but nobody else did. In fact

29:30 my mother was very upset, I was a regular attendee at the local Anglican Church, St Barnabas, I was a choirboy and an alderman, and for a few years when I got polio, not one person from the Church even queried where I was. That put her right off the Church for a long time, but again that's human nature.

30:00 **What about your brother and sister? Your brother would have been born by then?**

Just. Yeah.

So how did your mother keep him away from you?

Well they were all in the house, that wasn't a problem, the infectious side was over by that stage, yeah. So when I was home some people visited, but not a hell of a lot. I mean, at that stage kids are kids they have got their own lives to live, they

30:30 don't - the worst and last thing they want is to go and look at somebody lying in bed all day.

When you were lying there in the brace, did you ever think that, did you ever think about the damage that could be caused in the long term?

No. No. The thing I do remember about polio is when I was in the infectious diseases hospital and it was a very long ward, with beds on both sides, and the end, and I was right on the end,

31:00 on each side were the iron lungs, and nobody could, you never had any visitors, with the exception that if somebody did come to visit, you knew that somebody in the iron lung was in a bad way, and this family came in and screamed and gathered around and they left and, about an hour later, this person died, I never knew who was in there to start with,

31:30 all you could see was the face in the mirror, and of course they wheeled the gurney out and I said to the chap next to me, he was an adult, "I wish these people wouldn't die just before lunch." and he just looked at me, said, "You callous young" I was 10 or 11, whatever it was. But I suppose one thing that did do, it gave me awareness of

32:00 the fatality of death. It never, ever worried me. When you are 10 or 11 and watching people die it's, not a lot, I think it was only about three actually died in hospital in the three month period where we were. Something most kids of that age don't see, I suppose.

How did you react to the grieving families that were coming in and ...?

I really can't remember to tell you the truth, I really can't remember.

32:30 I don't think I really think I thought about it at all, you just thought, 'Oh well, obviously they were in a bad way.' First indication you had that they were.

Do you remember the day you came out of the brace?

Nope, can't remember anything about it. Can't remember the first day - they kept taking me out of the brace when I was doing physio, then I would go back into it, so that I didn't - and, , for the last

- 33:00 three months of being in bed, I wasn't in a brace, I was only in it for about 11 months I think, 12 months. I really can't remember, you are talking 50-odd years ago. My memory is good but it's not that good.

So when you - how old were you when you joined the cadets at Adelaide High?

Um, whatever the minimum age is for joining the cadets,

- 33:30 I can't remember. It was 14 I think.

And what was it about the cadets that appealed to you?

I don't know, I have always wanted to go in the service, even when I was a kid. The only thing was the toss up, was whether it would be the army or navy, I always had a, probably favoured toward the army, but always

- 34:00 wanted to and the cadets was a good way of getting a basic - cadets were very good. Nearly everybody I know that went in the army did a reasonably, did reasonably well in the army, had been through school cadets, which is probably a bit of a plus for them. They were good, put a bit of imposed discipline into the kids, nothing wrong with that.

What did you do in the cadets?

Well

- 34:30 each year you could do a specialist, I did all weapon handling, machine guns, mortars, all that sort of stuff, which they don't do these days. Yeah, I enjoyed it.

Do you remember having to shoot a gun for the first time?

What, in the cadets?

Mmm?

No not really, probably down the range, but I can't remember it now.

When

- 35:00 **you had to make the decision between army and navy, what swayed you to army?**

I don't know, I think I just always had a tendency to that more than the navy. No real reason. Probably, I expect probably because my father had been in the army during the war. But then again all my mother's brothers were in the navy, so.

- 35:30 **What impressions did you have of the navy?**

White uniforms. No, I think, at that stage I wanted to become, in fact I wanted to do three things, either go in the army, do a midshipman's course in the navy, or become a patrol officer in New Guinea, they were my three main things.

- 36:00 I wanted to follow Errol Flynn, I think. I enquired about patrol officer in New Guinea, and a friend of ours who had been up there sort of talked me out of that, being in New Guinea subsequently, I am glad he did. The navy, I sort of only played with the idea of that. No, I think it was always the army I wanted to go into.

- 36:30 **What were you told about the patrol in New Guinea?**

I really can't remember, to tell you the truth. I know that after being there it was pretty valid. But no, I can't remember, just the fact that it was pretty poorly paid and a pretty thankless sort of a job. It took a hell of a while to get to any degree of responsibility, basic responsibility, you are

- 37:00 assistant patrol officer for years. I am afraid I always liked to do my own thing, probably too much so sometimes, but still, that's it, the army, I decided to go in the army.

What do you remember of your OC in the cadets?

Paddy Sheehan, he scared the hell of me, he was a real martinet. And it was

- 37:30 funny that I came home and somebody talked me into an old scholars' reunion at the Public Schools' Club and he was there and I was amazed to find out that in actual fact he was only seven years older than I was but in those days at 13, a bloke 21, 24, is an old bloke. In fact that happened with a lot of these teachers, it wasn't until I went to this reunion that I realised how

- 38:00 little difference in age there was. The most there was about 10 years, 12 years, and as you get older

that's nothing, but in those days it was a big gap. But no, he was very good. As a matter of fact he was the OC of the school cadets right through to they stopped it. But no, he was a very nice chap but, as I said, he scared the hell out of me in those days.

38:30 **Why did he scare you?**

Oh just - he walked around with three pips on his shoulder and he must have been in the Second World War, right at the very end, he had some champagne ribbons on I know that. Just his attitude, rough.

How many times a week did the cadets meet?

Once, then you'd have weekends, you'd have bivouacs every

39:00 now and then. Camp during school holidays, all be down at Warradale.

What did you do on camp?

The same thing you did normally, just weapons training, went down the range, stuff like that. The whole idea was just to make life interesting for us you know, not getting too carried away with the whole thing. I

39:30 remember we lined the route when the Queen came out in - what was it? - 1954, 1955, whenever she came out to Adelaide, and we lined the route for that, and I always remembered that, being very proud in those days in my uniform. Looking back now, it was pretty Mickey Mouse, but a matter of perspective.

And what was your uniform?

It was exactly the same as the First

40:00 World War and Second World War uniforms. The old issue blouse and, same as the Second World War started off with before they got battle dresses, wore the same uniform as my father did.

How did your father feel about you being in the cadets?

Alright I think, I think he encouraged it. Yeah, he was very encouraging I think.

Tape 2

00:31 **Just still on the cadets ...**

I really can't remember...

Do you remember any of the practical training that you did?

I remember going out to Port Wakefield and firing mortars up there, three inch mortars and the - Vickers machine gun, but no, not really,

01:00 we are going back 50 years.

You said earlier that you actually volunteered for the National Service at 16?

I, when I left school I went to work for a short while with Norwich Union Insurance Company, and my - 18 that come up for

01:30 National Service, and they brought in the ballot, the initial ballot system under the old National Service scheme, with the date, and my date didn't come up so I just decided I would volunteer for it which I did and went into the 16 National Service in early 1958. No, couldn't have been early 1958, it would

02:00 be, have to be June 1958 because I turned 18 in June so it had to be after that. Yeah.

How did your parents feel about you doing that?

Well they didn't mind me doing that. National Service, bearing in mind that I - under normal circumstances I probably would have had to have gone any rate. Again, this ballot paper only came in on this intake that I was going in, everything changed

02:30 as I approached them, so prior to that I would have got in anyway. But they were quite happy with that, not a problem.

And when you told them this was going to be a career choice how did they feel about that?

Well when I finished National Service I then said that I wanted to join the army, if you were under 21 you needed your parents' permission.

03:00 My mother didn't really have a problem with it I don't think, but my father did. He didn't really have a

problem with me going into the army, he had a problem with me enlisting. His comment was when I said I wanted to go in the army, he said, "Well, you may as well go and get your commission now." I said, "No, I want to enlist in the army as a soldier." He couldn't accept that.

03:30 Any rate he finally signed the papers and I went in the army. That was probably the last meaningful conversation I had with my father. The only time I spoke to him after that was when I came home on leave and he'd say, "Oh you're home, when are you going back?" He couldn't accept the fact

04:00 that I didn't do what he wanted me to do.

What did he want you to do?

He wanted me to go through RMC [Royal Military College]. I didn't want to do that. I thought if I went in as enlisted, you can enlist for three or six years, which I enlisted for six, if at the end of six years you don't like it you can get out, if you go through RMC you are really tied in those days. But he couldn't see that argument.

04:30 I wasn't going to be a commissioned officer, he didn't think it was going to be worth while. So, but that's again, that's life.

What was your argument to your father to enlist?

Basically the six year part, if I didn't like it I could get out after six years. If you go through RMC you have a certain commitment, you are expected to go, in those days, go through and stay in. If you don't

05:00 like it you are stuck and I can't think of anything worse than doing a job that you don't really enjoy. I don't care how much money you are making, you have to have the enjoyment out of it. So that was my main reason.

So when you joined National Service, what were the other men like?

Again I was, everything I do seems to be different. I

05:30 went into the platoon that was predominantly, except for five of us, were all made up of Broken Hill lads. Nearly all of them worked in the mines and in those days we got £2.17.6 per week and that was our wage for doing National Service. These lads in the, from Broken Hill, mostly in the mines, were making, at 18 years of age, making between £18 to £25 per

06:00 week. Now that was a middle manager's wage in Adelaide. Now what happened when they went into National Service, the mines made up their money from National Service money from what they were getting in the mines. So when we started to get leave we'd all go out and they'd take the other five of us with them, I mean £2.17.6 as against £25 a week was big money

06:30 in those days. They were rough nuts, but they were extremely good, real good crew.

So where did you actually do your National Service?

Woodside. 16 National Service. Yeah. Yep.

What were the facilities like at Woodside?

Very, very primitive, very primitive. The showers, I mean it was during winter, the ice buckets outside would all ice

07:00 up, that's how cold it was. The showers were old tin sheds with - very primitive, but you didn't expect anything else, you went in there you didn't expect anything else, so you didn't worry about it. Yeah. You would never get away with it today, but in those days you just accepted it.

The men that were actually drafted into National Service, how did they react to you having volunteered?

I don't think they knew. They didn't know I don't think, well,

07:30 I don't think so, I don't think it ever came up. I might have told a couple of close mates that my ball hadn't come up but, no, I don't generally speak about it, they wouldn't have worried. I don't think I was the only one that volunteered, there was a few that did it. Yeah. What I didn't know at that stage, that if I did National Service that I would then, if I went into the regular army,

08:00 that I would not have to do recruit training at Recruit Training Battalion. I wasn't aware of that until I got halfway through National Service, which I thought was great, probably the easy way of doing recruit training. But I enjoyed it, I finished up as - they had a big - they promote so many in National Service to corporals, I finished up as National Service corporal. In the march out parade I finished up as

08:30 the company commander of the A Company at the march out parade. So I had a ball.

What training did you do in National Service?

Well, basic recruit type training, drill, weapons training, field craft. Our platoon was the Specialist

Signals Platoon, so in the last two or three weeks you did basic signals work. But that was very, very, very

09:00 basic, just to give you a feel for it. The idea at that stage was when you had finished National Service, you had to go in and do an obligatory two years in the CMF [Citizens Military Force]. I would have then posted to Signals Unit, probably 144 6 Squadron.

What basic training did you do with signals in National Service?

A bit of line work, telephones,

09:30 switchboard, very basic, few radios, field radios, extremely basic, may as well not have done it but just something to give you a feel for it, that's all.

And what was the equipment you were using?

Old field telephone sets, field switchboards. What you call a radio set the 26 10 set which we used during the Second World War. That was it.

10:00 **How did you spend your leave during National Service?**

What leave? I think we only had two weekends off. Went down town, yeah. We'd all book into a pub, the Ambassador I think in those days. That used to be the hotel all the Broken Hills would stay at when they came down. A bit rough

10:30 but very enjoyable.

How did the girls react to you in your uniform?

Don't remember. I don't think I really worried about it in those days. Nup.

So when you finished National Service, you remember your graduation so to speak?

The ...?

When you

11:00 **left National Service?**

I remember the graduation there, the march out parade was they had a big parade. I do because, as I said, I had the company commander, one of the two companies, yeah, it was good. I know I had my heart in my mouth to make sure I gave the right orders at the right time and all the rest of it at the march past. Yeah. No, it was good.

So what qualities do you think you had to become a company commander?

11:30 Well I am not sure why I was promoted - given - made a National Service corporal, or why I got the job. I think that one of them was that I indicated that two thirds of the way through the National Service, that I was seriously thinking about joining the army, so they would try and encourage you, and the other thing was that in those days it was

12:00 just the fact that I was genuinely interested. A lot of them just went through the motions because they had to. Something I enjoyed so that always shows out normally, in most endeavours, people know you enjoy it so they try and encourage you.

And when you were posted to signals, how did you feel?

12:30 Well I didn't want to go to signals, I wanted to go to infantry. So I went to the School of Signals and did the course there, then I managed to corps transfer to infantry and went to the 2nd Battalion and after doing that I [was] immediately put in the Signals Platoon of the 2nd Battalion. I went up to the exercise grand slam at - up in

13:00 Queensland, Mackay, Serena area. Prior to going up I had applied - I volunteered for SAS, not really knowing what SAS was at that stage, it only started in 1957, it was just something different. While I was up there, SAS were, there was only a company of about 110 blokes

13:30 acting as the enemy for the big exercise with the Armoured Regiment. Because I had volunteered to - already volunteered, they were looking for extra people because they didn't have enough, I got seconded from 2 Battalion and got sent over to work with them. Obviously when that finished and we went back to Holsworthy, and was posted to SAS to do the selection course.

Can I just ask what it was about signals that you didn't like?

14:00 It wasn't that I didn't like signals I just wanted to be an infantry soldier. I mean, the backbone of the army is Infantry. Actually, I finished up doing, fulfilling both, I liked signals, it was good and a good corps. No, I

14:30 always thought in those days that infantry was the backbone of the army, which it is. Everything

revolves around it.

What was the big appeal of infantry?

You can fight people. I know better now but still, I was a young bloke then. I mean you go into the army and, to use an American expression, you are a bit gung-ho, you want to get out there and do things. The chances

- 15:00 are of course in those days that the only postings overseas were in Malaya. Battalions used to go over there in rotation. Signals Squadron over there, Commonwealth Signals Squadron, but only a few would go over at any one time. So your chances of going over to Malaya were much higher in infantry than they were in any other corps. I have subsequently found out of course, that the best corps for postings all round the world is signals, but that's due to, you didn't, the young soldier didn't know that.

So when you were posted to

- 15:30 **Holsworthy, in 2 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], what training did you undergo there?**

Signals, I went into the Signals Platoon, just normal Infantry training, normal signals communication stuff, radios, lines, things like that.

What had you heard of SAS?

Nobody really knew much

- 16:00 about it at that stage. They just had a few posters up around the orderly room saying 'VOLUNTEER FOR SPECIAL HAZARDOUS DUTY' I can't remember how it was worded now, parachuting, all this sort of thing. It sounded alright, so I applied. I think it may have had something to do with my father being with an independent company during the war. 2/4th Independent, but no, just -

- 16:30 I suppose the glamour of it, something different.

What was the attitude within SAS, what kind of attitude were you greeted with there?

Well, it's a long involved process I don't know about attitude. Firstly you do, you do the first part of the preliminary process, and you do a psych [psychological] test,

- 17:00 and you do what they used to call the courage test. And the psych test was a normal written psych test, followed by an interview by a psychologist, the psych test, the written psych test, always amused me because there was a question in there, 'If you can get into a movie theatre through a part open door, would you do so?' I was never quite sure

- 17:30 whether you should answer yes or no. I can't remember what I answered, now come to think of it.

So what was the preliminary selection process?

Well psych test initially. Then they had this courage test, and bearing mind I was in Sydney, they took us to South Head, you know South Head in Sydney? It's extremely high with the heads to the Bay. They threw a rope over the heads, I am not sure how high it is, about 100 -

- 18:00 they show you the basic method of roping off the karabina, you were expected to go over and pull yourself up. Now I think there were about 50 that did that and got through the psych stuff and on that phase in Sydney, and I think there was three that
- 18:30 went over the rope, so three out of 50, I think about 180 did the psych, did the test and about 50 finished up doing - about 150 not out, this is roughly 50 were then went approximately [and did] the courage test, three of them were, three of us were then accepted. You then went across to the west and did was is now called the selection
- 19:00 course, was then called the cadre course or the same thing. For six weeks you were put through purgatory, you ran, did all the tests did all the training, for instance the army has a series of, you do a nine mile run, a full equipment, full packs sort of thing in 120 minutes. SAS, you got to do it in 90 minutes. You do a two mile run
- 19:30 again with all, I think the army does it in 18 minutes, you have got to do it in SAS in under 15 minutes. So they push you to the ultimate. One segment you have two weeks of when you have, you are lucky if you have one hour's sleep in any 24 hours. And just to see whether you go. And it is not really a matter of
- 20:00 being, you have got to be reasonably fit, and I was in those days, but it's more mental attitude because when you have absolutely had it, you realise you have any and you can still keep going and I think, I mean we used to have, on this selection course say you'd have 50, you'd have about 10 and we'd get through that, and
- 20:30 bearing in mind there was 150 applied in NSW about the time I went, this is roughly, they got whittled down to three, and that finished up 50 out of the whole of Australia and out of that 10 get in. So it's pretty fulfilling.

What were the kind of things they were asking you in the psych test?

I can't remember. The only thing I can remember was this blasted thing about would you sneak into a

21:00 theatre if you thought you would get away with it. I always thought the fact, I always thought I would, I worked out that they were looking for someone that would take a risk. Now whether that was what they were looking for I don't know. Maybe it was, I got in.

And during that stage of the psych test, did you meet the psychologist then?

Yeah, you met the psychologist after, you did the psych and you were interviewed by the psychologist, yeah.

What was

21:30 **the psychologist asking you?**

Normal things, 'If you were on a high cliff would you feel like jumping off?' And the answer to that is, 'Not unless you have got a parachute on,' things that I consider quite ridiculous but reasons obviously why they ask them. But I can't remember what they were and, again, it was a long time ago.

Were you able to see the reasons why they were asking all of these questions?

You

22:00 can normally work out what they were looking for, well I could. Yeah. Then again some people can't otherwise they wouldn't have them, but then again when I say I know what they were looking for, I may not have been right but I was right enough to get through, that was the main thing.

So when you went back to the west and you started doing the more physical training, the endurance training, mentally, how were you preparing yourself?

22:30 I wasn't. I very rarely ever knowingly prepare myself, I just take it day by day as it comes along. If I know something is coming up, I know I have just got to do it tomorrow, and I just go and do it. The more you think about it, the less chance you have of doing things in most cases, I find anyway. I mean there are certain things you do, you have got to be

23:00 reasonably fit to start with obviously. But I have seen chaps that are not as fit, all that fit get through whereas blokes a lot fitter haven't and it's all been a mental attitude. That's how they think their way through, they just won't give up.

And did they test your nerves at any stage?

Well if you think of throwing

23:30 a rope over the South Head, North Head, ever seen photographs of that, the rocks where they rescue people? That's where they do it, and that gets your nerves a bit. But no, not really I suppose.

What were you thinking when you were standing at the top of that, and looking down and ...?

It's a long way. I don't know again, too long ago.

24:00 I was probably thinking of the techniques that they showed me to do for roping, that they were more interested that I do it right, than do it wrong because you know darn well that if somebody does it, it can be done. I mean it's just a matter of make sure you do it the right way. Yeah. Like parachuting. When you do the first parachute jump, you are more interested in everything that you have to do,

24:30 you really don't have time to be really afraid, or not really scared anyway.

I was about to ask you about parachuting, what was it like when you first jumped?

Um, the phases of the parachute training prior to the actual jump are more unnerving than the actual jumping. The polish tower and things like that. But the first jump we jumped out of Dakotas, you know, a DC3,

25:00 , that's very enclosed with a group in there. The first jump of course is without equipment you've only got your parachute on and the reserve. You're still thinking of everything you have got to do, the mechanism of getting out of the aircraft and what you do when you get out. You are thinking so much about that that you, I won't say you're not

25:30 scared because I have never ever jumped when I wasn't very apprehensive, some chaps I think weren't, I don't think they had any imagination whatsoever, but no, it's one of those things that you, like everything, you are too interested in what you are doing than you are too scared to do it. And the other thing is peer pressure, if the others are going to do it, you are going to do it.

26:00 That answer your question?

I was about to ask you, how do they prepare you for that jump?

Extensive, they do a lot of ground training, how to roll, parachute training, polish tower which is 120 feet high, they put you on a frame and let you go and you just drop under control with the exit tower, all that sort of stuff,

26:30 a lot of it. I nearly didn't do it because when we did our medical for the first jump, and bearing in mind I was as fit as a mallee bull in those days and I had just finished the selection course and all that sort of stuff, I don't think I had an ounce of fat on me, more than I can say now, and I weighed, the maximum weight for jumping was 13 stone and I weighed in at 13. 10.

27:00 And they said, "Sorry, you can't jump. But what we'll do, we'll send you down to the Base Hospital at RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Williamtown," which they did and the doctor down there checked me and said, "With your bone structure you will never get below 13 stone," and he cleared me for jumping. As far as I know I am only the second bloke ever

27:30 jumped on a parachute course, post-war, that didn't prescribe to the regulations. The other one was a mate of mine, Bill Madigan. The height of the door in the Dakota was pretty restrictive, if you were over 6'2", I can remember, you couldn't jump, and he was an inch over the height and they gave him special dispensation. So as far as I know, we were the only two who

28:00 were allowed to jump when we didn't come under the prescribed rules, which was a great relief, because I had been through purgatory to get to the stage I had reached.

Well I was just wondering, when they told you you couldn't jump, how you felt?

I don't know what I would have done but I would have been very impolite to somebody I am sure. But it worked out OK.

Sounds like there would have been a lot of risk taking involved in your training?

28:30 Well no, I don't think there was risks. Like everything, if you are trained properly - there is, you are right, but you bring that down to the minimum risks by training and doing and thinking about what you are doing. The main thing really is to stay focused,

29:00 if you stay focused and don't deviate from what you are supposed to do you are normally pretty right. It's when you are waylaid by something else that you have problems, accidents. And up to the time I did my parachute course, they had never had a fatality in parachuting in the peacetime army in Australia. They had a few subsequently, not at the training, not at the school, but subsequent jumps. We've had very few fatal accidents

29:30 in Australia in military parachuting. I would never be a member of a civilian club, they are dangerous. But no, pretty good, they were safe.

And were there any major injuries at that time?

For me?

For anyone?

No one I was doing - not training, no.

What about yourself?

The only major injury I had doing parachuting was when I slammed into a tree doing a, what they call a tree jump in the jungle.

30:00 I busted my arm, shoulder for a while, and it still gives me, plays up a bit, but apart from that no. They get pretty prone to getting knocked around in those, any rate. A few mates have been killed in it, parachuting subsequently, operations. More killed in car accidents than in parachuting or anything else.

A lot of your tactical running or the endurance that you

30:30 **underwent would have really pushed you to the limit, what was it that kept you going?**

Just a matter of mind over matter, if you don't mind it doesn't matter. No, that's not right. It's just a matter of knowing that there's always something that you have got and it'll keep you going. Like if you do something wrong,

31:00 people get all uptight about what the penalty is going to be, there's only a limit of what people can do to you, I mean, they can't eat you, it's against the law, socially unacceptable. So all you have got to think is, 'Doesn't matter what happens, nothing is going to be that drastic that I can't recoup.' So you just keep going.

Did you ever have moments when you thought, 'This just isn't worth it?'

Yes, lots, but then you just think, eh, you

31:30 just snap out of it and keep going.

And how were the other men coping during this training?

I have no idea, probably the same as me. They got through. I used to, the period during when we had the selection course where we were doing the two weeks, it became a quarter of a condo course, virtually no sleep at all, you get briefed,

32:00 you'd do a raid on a dam, blow a dam up and, and all this sort of stuff. I used to just wander through in the dark, and most of our stuff was done at night in those days, it was all training with night work, and I always had this luminous bottle of Schweppes Bitter Lemon floating in the sky in front of me, that's what I am going to drink when I get back, things like that, you switch off. That's really the aim, don't

32:30 think about what you are doing.

And during the selection process, did they do any kind of training which looked into interrogation processes and how you would cope with interrogation?

No you did that later, Code of Conduct course.

So during the selection process you are in quite a small group, how was the mateship in that group?

Very close. The camaraderie in SAS is probably the best one, best,

33:00 closest I have ever seen of any unit, very, very good. Everybody was very, very close. And that's mainly - once you have done the selection course, the selection course brings it out. When you become operational you are working in small groups and everybody strictly relies on the other bloke. If you are in a battalion you [are] out with the platoon, with 30, 40 or 100 blokes, I mean you are not reliant to that extent with

33:30 individuals, but when you are working in small groups and the selection course works, you split up into patrols, you are very reliant on the other people, and you become very close.

During the selection process was there any sense of competitiveness?

Oh you are always trying to do better than the other bloke, but by the same token if there was somebody that was, particularly

34:00 you liked and having a bit of a problem, normally you would find a couple of blokes would give him a subtle help along which is what it is all about. We didn't look very favourably later when I ran the things, or helped run them, on blokes that were complete individuals and wouldn't - if you want individuals you need them, because individuals also work as a team, most important.

34:30 It is in any job, as far as I am concerned.

During the selection process did any of the men break down or ...?

Some blokes would give it away, just decide they couldn't go any further and they were just sent back to the unit and back to Swanbourne and put in a - and by the time you got back they weren't there. They got rid of them very quickly. They would be back to the eastern states, or wherever they came from, back to their parent unit.

35:00 **The selection process was to weed out a lot of these kind of men, but during the process was there at any stage a point at which the officers in command would just say, 'No, you've got to go, you just can't do it?'**

No, not till the end. Well, no that I can remember, not when I did, I don't remember anyone being counselled halfway and said, 'Look, I

35:30 don't think you are going to do it,' and they dropped out. They left that up to you to decide whether you were fit to go on. This is part of the whole idea, it's not just trying to weed people out, it's also teaching them the special techniques of SAS and so forth. In those days we concentrated, this is prior to Vietnam, very much on movement at night. Hardly any army moves at

36:00 night, so if you can move at night and do things at night you are that far in front of the others, it's dangerous. But no, I don't think anyone was counselled that they didn't think they could go on. A few blokes dropped out on injuries and that, some of them were given the opportunity of doing another course, depending on the injury, but most were returned to unit.

And during the selection process, what sort of

36:30 **qualities were [they] looking for when it came to being able to work at night?**

Just a matter of being silent, quiet, seeing, patrolling techniques, that's basically it. It's quite difficult walking through jungle or heavy timber at night without making a sound, it takes a long time to walk from

37:00 point A to point B.

And do you remember being selected?

The final ...? Just came to us with a list and said, "You chaps are now qualified. You'll go and do the parachute course." We were again - previously they used to do the parachute course and then the selection commenced. We did the selection course

- 37:30 first and then the paro on the basis that it costs a lot of money to put someone through a parachute course. So they weren't rationalised, the fact that it's better only putting those through that qualify and not those that aren't going to qualify. So we went and did the parachute course and you come back and we had a, they are, have a parade and you are issued with, in those days, the red beret before we got the sandy beret and that's it, you are one of the boys.

And how did you feel when you got selected?

- 38:00 Great. Rather proud. Yeah. Very select group, or club, whatever you want to call it, no yeah, I enjoyed it.

Is there an initiation into this club?

No, no they haven't got that sort of mentality. You become a member, you go on a patrol, which is your section, and from there on you

- 38:30 keep training with that patrol. You might, from there, you would start then to do the specialised courses, demolition, unarmed combat. We started, my platoon, we were 2 Platoon, we started, we were the first co-ordinator response platoon. Everybody does everything, but each platoon specialised in those days, on a particular

- 39:00 facet and ours was diving, canoeing and all that sort of stuff. Now they have a squadron that does that.

And where was the parachute course?

In those days the parachute course, Williamtown, RAAF Williamtown, the air force run it.

And, just briefly, you mentioned before when you were a part of the selection process, what weaknesses did you

- 39:30 **look, or did they look for in the SAS?**

As somebody running the course, well you are really only looking at two main aspects, you are looking to make sure they get through and they do it the right way, and by that I mean no cheating or anything, very rarely anything they could do but,

- 40:00 and the other thing to look for is somebody that 's not too much of an individualist, in other words the jack man. I mean you are always looking for individuals, but individuals who are willing to work together, and you need them to be individuals because a lot of jobs you might go and sit on OP, observations post, by yourself for two weeks or just two of you, doing a job, not

- 40:30 everybody's suitable for that sort of work, they are not mentally tuned. A lot of people don't like working by themselves, they have got to be in a group, we have a group mentality, those sort of things, and they tend to come out as the course goes along, just in the natural training process.

Tape 3

- 00:31 **Alan, you were just telling us that you were involved in the selection committee, what was your role in the selection committee?**

Not the selection committee as such, we had two or three that would [go] around each state and do the preliminary selection but once they came over to the west to do the selection training, then I was on the cadre staff to run that. I think two different courses, one before Vietnam and one

- 01:00 after the first tour of Vietnam. Oh just basically up and make sure they did all the training, go with them, run all the check points, legs, they do different training, orienteering. Just generally making sure all the training was done as per the syllabus, and being as nasty as possible

- 01:30 at that particular time. No, not really, it sounds good.

Why did you have to be a bit ruthless?

The whole idea, not the whole idea, one idea was to drive them as hard as you can, quite frankly to see if they give up. And that's one of the reasons for the selection course, to see if they have got the necessary ability to keep going.

- 02:00 As I said to you before, it's surprising, I have seen people that are that fit they could run a marathon in Costello times but don't get through a cadre course if they don't have the right mental attitude, and that's really mainly what it's about, make sure they can keep going and think rationally while they are doing. I mean anybody can keep going, staggering, but you still have got to think and

02:30 do things at the same time. Does that answer your question?

It does, I am wondering, can you explain a bit more about that mental attitude and ...?

Not really, I just think it's one of those things. You've got – to be successful in that sort of thing you really need the ability to drive yourself when you think you've had it, to keep driving yourself further,

03:00 virtually until you collapse physically, your legs give way or your heart gives way and you can't move. If you are physically capable of doing, the only thing that stops you is mentally, thinking you can't do it, and the whole idea is to just keep going, just think of something else, and switch on to what you are doing when you need to. That's why I used to walk around

03:30 thinking of this great big icy dripping Schweppes Bitter Lemon bottle in front of me [that] I opened the first thing when I got back to camp, when I – was to have a bit-, Schweppes Bitter Lemon. I wouldn't drink it in a fit these days but in those days it was good. It's really driving yourself that little extra bit.

Well I don't want to get too far ahead, but because you were involved

04:00 **on staff or the selection committee as you say after your first tour, I am just wondering how that the SAS training might have changed, or techniques?**

What, from now to what it is now? Selection committee, selection course, is virtually, with a few

04:30 variations, is the same system as what it was when I went through. It's the same aim, to weed out those that aren't fit, that's it, it's really a weeding process. They change, I mean we used to use areas like 2J and in training and they used the Stirling Ranges, they can't use that now for environmental reasons. But there's

05:00 always different areas, but basically the same basic system. And I can't think of another way you could do it. All you have got to put as much stress, both physically and mentally on people, to see whether they can cope.

And how often in your time have you seen men get through the selection process and then further down the track let the side down or

05:30 **not quite perform?**

Occasional one, the occasional one does something silly. There are, they do have variations on the course, for instance I was over in the west, three years ago I went over for a conference with the association, I am on the SAS Association committee, sorry, I was, I am now off it. There was a selection course just arriving from the

06:00 east the day we arrived at Pearce. Now they were all told to get themselves fit as they possibly can. And one of the things you promote over there is self discipline. The only way to get yourself fit, individually fit, is – so they were told they had to be fit before they get over to the west, and they are reasonably fit but not as fit as they need to be over there. I mean there's fitness for the normal

06:30 Rifle Battalion, but not fitness for SAS. What they did, the C1 Hercules arrived and at Edinburgh, sorry, Pearce, they got off, ready to get on the bus. All the gear was put to one side, the weapons for the equipment, immediately went on a nine mile run, straight after coming on the flight on the Hercules. Anyone that didn't complete their run in the prescribed time got straight

07:00 on the Hercules back again. One third of them went back because they hadn't got themselves up to the fitness on their own. So that's the sort of thing, but they do variations, I thought it was a good idea actually, I wish I'd done it when I was there, but they all came in dribs and drabs by air or by train in those days. No, that's what they did. So one third of the Hercules flight went straight back, didn't even do the course because they weren't up to

07:30 physical standard to do that run straight off the aircraft. Somebody said, "That's a bit harsh," but saved a lot of mucking around.

I can see your point, it is a tough call.

None of them were expecting it, none of them were told they were going to do it. Again, which is one of the things, a lot of the things you do through the course is not scheduled, is routine, is programmed, but every now

08:00 and again you put something in that they don't know is going to happen, and that's done deliberately also.

So you – in some ways are you looking to catch them, throw them off guard I guess?

I suppose to a degree yeah, see how they handle stress. I had a chap that I remember was very, very

08:30 good, , extremely fit, very capable soldier, very, very good. But as soon as any stress came in he'd immediately go and sit in a corner of a room with a migraine and it had to be something extremely stressful that a migraine hit him. Obviously, it doesn't matter how good or how –

09:00 not suited because something could happen operational that would be far more stressful than anything you could invoke on them in training. So this bloke, if you had've looked at him you would have thought he was the epitome of the super soldier. A real special event put on, just migraine hit him.

And why did

09:30 **those training as SAS need above average training and [both?] physical and mental?**

Well the work's far different. Firstly, if you are in a field environment, say you are in operational what we call a green squadron, working in the jungle or desert or whatever it is, you are only working in a small group,

10:00 you are relying on, are carrying a lot more equipment than anyone else does because you might be going out for a period and you have got to carry all your equipment, your ammunition or your rations, you don't get, very rarely resupplied out there like a battalion does because as soon as you do that you are giving your location away. So you carry it with you, so you carry normally bigger loads, you have a lot more stress than you do in a

10:30 normal unit. And the training is designed, what you do in normal operations is probably not as hard physically as it is training. But your training has to be to the degree that if at the worst, you had to use your, you know, run 200 metres with a 13 stone bloke over your back, full weight under fire, you could do it.

11:00 So that's the main reason. All the parameters of what you do over the west are all brought down to 120 minutes to do one thing in the army, rest of the army, 90 minutes to do the same thing, all the rest of that sort of stuff. To do physical training, you do, I can't remember the figures now, you do eight chin-ups on the

11:30 bar in the army, you have got to do 15 in the SAS. It's just one of those things. British SAS, 22 SAS, do exactly the same, so do the American Seals. Yeah. Just extend the bar, the parameters.

Well you've talked about, when you joined SAS it was right back in the early days ...

12:00 It had been going two years when I joined, 1957, and I was end of 1959.

It might have applied then as it does now, I am wondering how sought after it is to get into and be selected for SAS?

Oh extremely, very competitive to get into it. But it's also very hard. They changed the system a few years

12:30 ago, that they didn't only recruit from the army, but they recruited from the navy and the air force and as far as I know only one air force bloke that has applied has ever got through. He was a physical instructor in the air force. They have quite a few navy blokes get in, but they were all navy clearance divers and their training is very rigorous too. They do a bit of military

13:00 training before they do the selection course. So a few of them get in but it's very competitive. They have teams go around, on a periodic frequency, have a selection board in different areas. There's one going on now as a matter of fact. I am very interested to see how this business of recruiting people off the street - my first reaction is it is

13:30 not going very, very well at all, but time will tell. Quite possible it will work, but then again it will depend on the individual.

Well going back to your story, we were talking about

14:00 **your training and selection for SAS, you mentioned that SAS had been going for two years, what did you learn about the SAS in your training prior to posting?**

Nothing. Nobody knew anything about it. You just knew there was a new unit started up, Special Air Service,

14:30 and that was all we knew about it. Once you got over there you found out a bit more of the background of the 1SAS, the British SAS, in Europe and the long range jet group and the Australia Jet NM Force, but prior to that I didn't know anything about it, I just knew that there was this unit that had special operations and parachuting, that was it.

15:00 It's evolved over the years, we didn't have counter terrorist capability, well, job, that we have now. It was mainly long range reconnaissance patrolling and that sort of stuff, small groups. But no, they handled it all very well, yeah, good unit.

15:30 **And at the end of your training period, how did your posting to 3 Squadron come about?**

Well I was, initially it was a company, 1SAS Company, which consisted of three, then four platoons, 1, 2, 3 and 4 Platoons, I was in 2 Platoon. We all did exactly the same training and each platoon was cut down into sections or patrols as they are called

- 16:00 over there. Unlike a normal battalion where a patrol is 10 men controlled by a corporal, SAS patrol is normally five men and the section commander or patrol commander is normally a sergeant, could be a corporal but normally a sergeant. So I went with 2 Platoon, and it was one of the best things that ever happened to me because my patrol sergeant was a bloke called Ray Simpson
- 16:30 and Ray got a VC [Victoria Cross] in Vietnam, at the training, in fact the same place I was but before I got there, and Old Chuda, as he was affectionately known because every second word was in Japanese because he married a Japanese lady, he was an education. This bloke looked like his face had been carved out of granite, like, you know, Mt Rushmore, that's what his face looked like,
- 17:00 Old Chuda. He was the hardest man I have ever known anywhere. He used to run our unarmed combat courses and I remember – sorry, am I digressing? – I remember old Ray was there, and he pigeon chested and he come out. He was running, an attack with a rifle and bayonet, and you are supposed to have the scabbard on the bayonet, but when you are in an
- 17:30 unarmed combat course under Ray Simpson you didn't have any scabbards, he only said to this bloke, Brian Platts, who looked like Sammy Davis Junior, "Come on Platts, have a go," and this time Ray was a bit too slow and Plattsie got him right along the side. Chuda just stood there, "Carry on Corporal Coleman," and went down to the RAP, Regiment Aid Post. About 15 minutes he come back, it had been stitched up,
- 18:00 a big plaster over it. He said, "Go back in the group, Corporal Coleman," he said, "Alright Platts, let's try that again." That's what he was like, he was unbelievable. The Claremont Football Club asked the unit if they could run pre-season training with a unit and get fit and the OC, then Glen Iles, said, "Yes." He said, "You can do it with the unarmed combat course." So
- 18:30 early in the morning we would get up and go for a run down in the sand hills for a couple of miles and come back, the Claremont Football Club came with us. The first match they played that year, Claremont, the team playing them, I think it was East Fremantle, finished up with 15 men on the field arrested or being knocked out or something like that. Claremont was, only trouble was they couldn't play football and they lost. Old Ray Simpson was unbelievable. When he got his
- 19:00 VC, our only query was which particular thing did he get it for? The man was a born soldier, unbelievable, old Chuda.

How much did Ray, I guess, set the standard?

Well you wouldn't want to tell everything Ray Simpson did, but pretty much – we – he was a

- 19:30 classic, he – I will have to tell you these stories. We're doing boating, capsize drills with canoes on the Swan River. Of course you always did this during the winter. You couldn't do it in the summer when it was nice and warm, not that it really gets cold in Perth. And we had the Minister for the Army, a bloke called Jack Kramer, the General Officer commanding Western Command, who was, can't remember, Brigadier Wearne, and the
- 20:00 OC of the company, were there, and old Ray was known for his colourful language, he couldn't say anything without an 'f' in it here and there. "Get those Diggers and –," and old Jack Kramer turned to the brigadier and said, "I am not very impressed with the sergeant's" – he was a sergeant at that stage – "language." And the brigadier turned
- 20:30 to the OC, who was a major, about to say, and all you could hear was Chuda saying, "Wasn't bloody well supposed to be, it wasn't meant for him." He sent a signal out in Vietnam to the training team saying, "When the training team advisors are briefing American senior officers, to refrain from using Australian vocabulary and swearing, because they did this very proper, with the exception of Warrant Officer
- 21:00 Simpson because we know he can't help it." And that was Ray Simpson, he was a legend. I spent my apprenticeship under him. He was a real card, been in Korea, Kap Yiong. Japan, met his wife there, married her. It was something a lot of blokes did not have the opportunity to do was to serve under a bloke like that.
- 21:30 Young gullible soldier, it was quite an experience I can tell you. But again, Ray never had the word 'can't' in his vocabulary. He'd try something, he would do it until he just physically couldn't go any further. Of course everybody else
- 22:00 took that as the yard stick.

You did mention that 2 Platoon was specialised in canoeing and diving?

We started when we were there, everybody used to do a bit, the specialist 1 Platoon became the specialist parachute course. In other words they started the first high altitude low opening chute. 2 Platoon became the water response, you did everything else but you

- 22:30 just did that in addition. We, 3 Platoon was, I can't remember what their specialty was, and 4 Platoon was vehicle, mounted vehicle operations type stuff. At this stage I was back in the Signal Corps. The SAS, a third of SAS is signals, because the

- 23:00 whole thing, that if you don't have the communications, it doesn't work. SAS decided they wanted all their operators basic - their main operators to be corps, Corps Signals trained, high quality and high speed Morse and that sort of stuff. And Corps Signals said, 'Well yes, you can provided all these positions in the regiment become Corps Signals.' So the next minute I was back in Signals Corps and I stayed signals for the rest of my career,
- 23:30 but I only served in one signals unit - two actually, two, rest of it was all infantry type postings. Any rate, we did it, we started a diving course. To do that, because the army didn't actually have anything, we had to go and went and locally purchased all our tanks, all our equipment. We had a bloke called Jackie Tsu in the
- 24:00 west, he ran a diving business, who had been in Z Force during the war, and Jackie Tsu acted as our unofficial advisor. Any rate, so we ran this first course which wasn't particularly successful and myself and a chap called Peter Sheehan were sent across to
- 24:30 HMAS Lewin and did the first part of the navy shallow water clearance diving course, and we went back and honed up our own skills. But it was very interesting, they now do a lot of work on it though, the water response group are responsible for counter terrorist work on the oil rigs and all that sort of stuff. Very, very accomplished, and still use some of the Second World War equipment, the old clappers, canoes still the same as they used in the Cockleshell Heroes
- 25:00 because nothing better has ever come up.

And what was wrong with that first course that you had to go off and get more training?

Well it only issued a very basic, we weren't professional enough to go on from there, so chaps went over to the UK and did the swimmer canoe course over there with the 22 SAS and the British special boats

- 25:30 section from the Royal Marines Commandoes and that, became very professional. The Australian SAS is different to the Americans. The American Special Forces don't do any water work, the [Navy] Seals do that, which is the navy. The Australian SAS does the whole gambit. British SAS do a little bit of it, but most of their water
- 26:00 work is done by the Special Boat Section. So here, because we don't have the navy equivalent, the army does the whole lot which is one of the reasons why we started taking clearance divers to give it a little bit extra expertise. When you start, when I say, our first basic course was very basic, but when you start looking at doing work on underwater demolition, you need a lot more expertise than you do in
- 26:30 the civilian and teach you how to dive. All we learned how to do is become aqua divers, not how to work, do work, which they do now very successfully. It was good, it was the embryonic stage of the whole thing.

What sort of diving gear were you able to use?

We used ,

- 27:00 in those days we'd buy CB gourmet tanks and then we got hookers which is - do you know what a hooker is? - a hooker is a very, very long cord set up to a gas tank on a boat so you don't have any tank on, you are unencumbered, you just over with the demand valve and do that. Each day they just have rebreathers, no tanks at all just rebreathing
- 27:30 which is a bit more dangerous than using a tank but it doesn't leave any bubbles on the surface. The canoes they use are still the same as they used in the Second World War, the old clapper, which are, as I said, they have never come up with anything better.

Can you describe the clapper?

It's a two-man canoe made of canvas, which collapses. Could have shown you a photograph last, if you had been here last night, but.

- 28:00 **How big is it?**

Good question.

Roughly?

From that door to that curtain, about the size of a normal canoe, two-man canoe. Yeah. Ever seen the film 'Cockleshell Heroes'? Well if you do they use them in that.

And why is it called a clapper?

- 28:30 Because that was the man that designed it, whatever you want to call it, same reason why they call the clapper the crapper.

And how heavy was it?

Oh two men can lift them from bow to stern. Normally four men comfortably, but two men can do it because you have to do it with two men, the crew is two.

29:00 They were very good, because they were canvas they fit down through a, through the hole in a submarine easily, so you can go out in the submarine and then go into, do your raid and that. Yeah. They are much better than a rigid type canoe.

And when you took them out on operations, how easy would they be to deflate?

29:30 Well you don't deflate them. They are not deflate as such, they are rigid. If you wanted to hide them somewhere, say if you were going up a river and you would paddle up overnight and lay up during the day, what you would normally do was push it up under the - and sink it, so it was under water, and when you are ready to recover it you just pull it up and tip it out and empty it and off you go. That's the easiest way to do it.

30:00 **And what other water skills did your Platoon need to ...?**

Oh ...

You mentioned explosives?

Yeah, you learned how to blow up things and put mines on the bottom of ships and that sort of stuff. Yeah. I mean, the first time I ever went underneath an aircraft carrier I was surprised, I

30:30 thought it would be a straight steel hull, in actual fact it has holes everywhere in it as outlets. You never think of it, you think of it being smooth but they are not. All interesting.

In your training for these water skills, how often could you actually practice blowing up something under water, how could you do that?

We'd use

31:00 areas round Garden Island or Rottnest, you didn't physically, you didn't actually to do a lot of blowing under water, but you did a lot of simulation. I mean, setting up under water is a little bit different from on ground because you are, everybody has already done demolition on the ground, so really once you set the thing up it's not really different, except you want to be

31:30 a long, long way away when you blow it because of the concussion on the water, unlike the ground, the concussion will kill you. Mmmm.

What's the knack to explosives under water?

Put the right place in the right place and they have got to blow it right way. You have got to direct the explosive so it goes towards maximum blast, towards where you want it to go,

32:00 same as any explosive.

Well after your platoon had completed their water skill training, where were you posted?

Well

32:30 we, I went across - where are we? 1964 - I went across to 1 Commando on detachment, which was in Sydney, to Middle Head, to help run their small scale raids course which is with the canoes and all that sort of stuff. Whilst I was there I got seconded to do another job which I did for a while.

33:00 And we started up a new - two of us from SAS and two from what is called Heavy Wireless Regiment, now it's a new regiment, we were the initial cadre that started up a new unit which was 127 Special Operations Squadron which is now the squadron that supports all the commando units and that. So we started that up and I took my discharge in

33:30 August 1964. And that was the end of my first period in the army and I came back to South Australia and I applied to check on doing medicine at Adelaide Uni, and I was told that my matriculation results were OK to do medicine and that

34:00 I would be OK to do it on the following year and to come back at the beginning of the following year to formally register, couldn't do it the year before, which I did to find out they had changed the ball park, again, as it happens with me everywhere I go. Somebody in their wisdom had decided that they would only accept people for the courses, specifically medicine and engineering I think it was, that had only been out of the education

34:30 system per se, for a maximum of one year. If you had been out of the so-called learning scenario for more than one year, you wouldn't be accepted. To say I was slightly perturbed was a slight understatement. Any rate nothing I could do about it. So I shopped around for a year, and Vietnam started up, and I re-enlisted.

35:00 **Why did you, given that you were so keen in a way to be a professional soldier, why did you discharge in 1964?**

Because I wanted to do medicine, I thought it would be a good idea.

You had a change of heart?

No, actually I thought of doing medicine and going back into the army as a RMO [Regimental Medical Officer], one of the reasons, and, the other thing in

- 35:30 1964, bearing in mind that over in the west the unit I was with there was continuous training and it has got to be to keep your skills up to the maximum, but nothing was happening. The closest thing to an operation at that stage, Malaya had finished, Borneo hadn't started, Vietnam wasn't going. Except for flying up and down the WA coast at one stage
- 36:00 for a few hours, you could almost go into Laos, come into Laos 1962, we never even looked like we'd be going on operations. We used to go to New Guinea and train up there, we were the only unit that trained in New Guinea. So, you are in a peacetime army, doing repetitious - it wasn't really for me. So when Vietnam started up of course, that was a different kettle of fish. I wasn't going
- 36:30 to do medicine and at that stage I was running camps for surveyors up the Strezlekie Track. Somebody was looking for someone, so I used to go and run their camps for them which was good fun, a lot of shooting when I am not doing that. I came back, I re-enlisted in January 1966
- 37:00 and that was when all the fun started. I - it was January and I was supposed to go across to Kapooka. Because I had been out over a year, I had been out August, 16 months, you had to go back to recruit training. Mind you, I had never been to recruit training, I did mine with National Service. So that was alright, go to Kapooka, and
- 37:30 so I, because I had been out for over a year, I lost all promotion qualification or qualifications so I was a recruit, paid as a recruit. And I was a kid and all ready to go away on the draft and somebody said they wanted to hang on to me for two weeks, "The barracks sergeant is going away, you are going to be acting barracks sergeant." I said it was not very right, I am not ever officially a trained soldier according to the system, I was going to be
- 38:00 acting barrack sergeant for two weeks, I did that. I finished up taking the draft to Kapooka. When we got there it was - I don't know - a full train from Sydney of recruits, they got there, there were 100s, I am not sure how many, they said, "Alright, all those with previous service fall out to the right." Any rate, at least half of the recruits had previous service,
- 38:30 all come back because of Vietnam. They said, "Alright, we'll issue you with your weapons and any pamphlets, training pamphlets, you want and tomorrow you'll start upgrading tests," in other words, upgrading to see how far recruit training they'll go. And they put myself and a chap named Jackie Fahey, whom I have never met again, I'd love to, in the same room, and Jack had got out in 1958,
- 39:00 when I first came in, so that's how long he'd been out. He'd been in the CMF for a little while, he'd seen an SLR rifle [self-loading rifle], so we are going through and I am trying to bring him up to date on what I could remember. So the following morning we had upgrade tests, and instead of having, doing the drill part side by side, they had a man in front and a chap behind. So everything, all the drill, everything I would do Jack would do just a fraction slower. Then we'd
- 39:30 do the field craft training to see how, I did all that and Jack did it after and just followed what I did and at the end of it, and I'll never forget this, I thought, 'Oh well, get through a certain - , ' and they upgraded me to completion, I didn't have to do any training at all. I was the only one, the rest of them went up to, Jack Fahey was one, to week five, it was a five week course. So I said, "What will I do now?" and they said, "Well you will be an assistant regimental drill
- 40:00 Instructor posting order." "Alright." Any rate, a day later, I didn't do any work with RDI [Regimental Drill Instruction], I had a posting order and it was to 126 Special Ops, directly, under the control of Military Intelligence and what happened, as soon as I had come into the army, my file was flagged and went to DMI [Director of Military Intelligence] and they
- 40:30 immediately got a posting to get me into there. So I thought this was alright, so I packed my bags, 'I am going to go to Sydney,' where it was at that stage, and that afternoon I was asked to come up to HQ [headquarters] and they said there was a bit of a problem and I said what was that, they said, "You've got another posting order, posting you to SAS." I said, "What happened, we've never seen this before?" So I had to front in to the
- 41:00 commandant, the colonel, he said - I said, "What do I do?" He said, "As far as I am concerned you have got two posting orders, which one do you want to go to?" I said, "Well, what's 126 doing?" normal thing - they were a parachute unit too. I said, "Are they going to Vietnam?" and he said, "No. SAS is," so I said, "I will go to SAS." So I got posted across, I went over there, I marched
- 41:30 in and the adjutant was a chap named John Doyle, ex-British Army, and John [and I] have become very, very close friends over the years, and I am a private and signals - signals again. He said, "Go and get your gear and so forth and settle in and come back and see me tomorrow morning," which I did. He said,
- 42:00 "I have got interesting news ..."

Tape 4

00:31 **Alan, you were just telling us the story about deciding between 126 and SAS. Can you tell us - just elaborate on why you chose SAS?**

Well one main reason, SAS were going to Vietnam and 126 weren't. So I took that posting and he said, "Is that OK? There's no precedent for this, we'll just tell Central Army Records where you are

01:00 going, and DMI, Director of Military Intelligence." So I went over there and seen John Doyle and came back the following morning and, "3 Squadron is doing their pre-SAS training in New Guinea which is the first squadron going to Vietnam. We have found a chap that's not up to scratch, we've taken him out and so you'll be going to Vietnam with 3 Squadron." I mean, I have only just come back in the army. He said,

01:30 "Alright, we'll send you across to Williamstown to do a refresher jump, you have to do at least three jumps every six months to keep your parachute pay up. Then you can go down to RAAF Richmond and the squadron will be there for embarkation to Vietnam." He gave me the brief on what I had to take with me. So I went to Williamstown. I had given up

02:00 cigarettes about a year before and went to Williamstown to do a refresher jump, but do a little bit of training but nothing like the basic course. The winds were pretty high and I stood in the stand-by room and somebody offered me a cigarette and that was it, I started smoking again. Anyway that's by the by.

Given that when you had originally left SAS,

02:30 **your physical fitness was extremely high, what had happened to your fitness during that down time?**

Still reasonably fit, I used to run in the morning, no matter where I was. Even now, I swim three mornings a week at a minimum, I am up at 6 o'clock, go across the big local heated pool all year round for about an hour.

But when you signed up

03:00 **again in 1966, you weren't necessarily thinking SAS?**

No, I didn't know whether I would get back there again or not. Only the fact that you have been there once doesn't mean they will take you back again. I mean, anyway, I went back, I did the parachute course, and got down to Richmond to meet the rest of the squadron and that was really funny, because we were there and half the Squadron have come into the system since I had

03:30 been out and, 'Who's this bloke?' sort of thing. One of them knew me from previously. In fact the signals section, the sergeant in charge of the signals section had been one of my corporals when I got out, so I knew most of them. So we are about to get on this aircraft and the OC of the Squadron said, "Welcome, you are incorrectly dressed."

04:00 I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Carry on, Corporal." I had been back in the army three weeks, four weeks I think, so I got on the aircraft as a corporal, no, lance corporal, sorry, there wasn't a position for a corporal. We arrived in country, I think I was in country two months and I was, I had two

04:30 two stripes up. But that was very interesting, that was the start of the task force, arrived and set up, and when they moved in they were all under ponchos, only little half shelters. Everybody moved into tents except us. We were the only ones to have the half shelters, and we were right out on the perimeter, and then the

05:00 Engineer Squadron, down at HQ Task Force, they have some funny things. Any rate, we were lying there one night and somebody, something happened and somebody opened up somewhere and the next thing the engineer's opened up, forgetting we are between them and the perimeter. I am lying on my back, and watching all these holes appear in my little half shelter. Nobody was hurt fortunately. Any rate, the following morning I walked

05:30 across to the engineers' lines and strangely enough there wasn't a bloke to be found anywhere. They weren't sticking around. Just opened, forgot there was a unit in front of them. No, there was some funny things that happened there.

Just before we get too far in to your ops in Vietnam, can you just go back to pre-embarkation and what -

06:00 **how were you briefed about Vietnam?**

I wasn't. I was just told I was going, that I would be taking over a spot in 3 Squadron, go and do the

para refresher, meet the squadron at Richmond and go to Vietnam. I wasn't briefed at all on anything, the squadron probably were, because I was an individual at this stage. I knew a bit about Vietnam, I had been to

06:30 Vietnam before in 1964, yeah. I was, before I got out of the army for the three months I was stationed at the United Kingdom Embassy at Vientiane in Laos, which represented the Commonwealth but had only Brits, no

07:00 Australians/Kiwis/Canadians on the staff there, and every two weeks I used to do the courier run from the site from Vientiane up to Saigon, to the Australian Embassy there. So I had been in Vietnam, but only to stay in a Caravelle Hotel and have a few drinks overnight and fly back the following day, so I knew what the country was like. But apart from that, no, I had no briefing from the

07:30 unit but there really wasn't time. A matter for John Doyle to say to me, "Listen, you are going into 3 Squadron in somebody's place, pack your bag and go to Williamstown, from Williamstown to Richmond and on the aircraft." By the time I got to Richmond, I was there on the tarmac an hour, put my gear there and on the aircraft. John Murphy the OC said, "Welcome to the Squadron."

08:00 That's how quick it was. No, most blokes going to Vietnam would have been briefed on customs and all that sort of stuff but no, I didn't.

And what sort of aircraft did you travel over on?

We went on a Qantas [Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service] flight. Those days you had to go over, you would have heard this before, polyester trousers, civilian shirt. We stopped at Singapore and Singapore didn't know officially that we were going through.

08:30 Once you left Singapore you changed into uniform, something like that from Gilbert & Sullivan. That was the political thing, reality of the times.

What was the SAS uniform that you took with you?

We went over in the polyester, you know, the khaki walking out dress, and over there we just wore the greens all the time, the

09:00 normal army uniform, that was until we started stealing stuff off the Yanks. When we got there, I will walk you through it, anything, please stop it. We started operations, we actual in fact, found that the equipment we had was woefully inadequate. We still had Second World War webbing, the old basic pouches and that.

09:30 So what we did, sorry, we had, unlike the rest of the army we had Bergen rucksacks, we didn't have the old normal packs. We actually contracted with a contractor in Hong Kong, and made this webbing to our design, we actually paid for it, our soldiers paid for their own webbing. No, that is something that has not come out before that I know of.

10:00 The stuff we had was for small style patrols, they were absolutely useless, you couldn't carry enough gear in it. This was 1966, we still had Owen guns, SLRs, and I think the first ambush, we were in a banana plantation and I had an Owen gun.

10:30 Little scurrying around me and attacking the butt of the, the wooden butt of the gun, Owen gun, and it turned out it was banana rats. After an hour, it wasn't a very successful place for an ambush so we moved. They were very ferocious, they had chunks nibbled out of the butt of the Owen gun. We got rid of them and were issued with the American M-16

11:00 which was a good weapon.

Where were you based?

At that stage Nui Dat. Down on the, that stage we moved in next to the task force. The following squadron moved up, what was called Nui Dat Hill Task Force, lots of funny ones. We had just been issued with a M79, which is a little grenade launcher,

11:30 and we were the only unit to get them because the Officers' Mess at Task Force, somebody, a grenade from the M79 landed right in the front door of the Officers' Mess, it went off with an extreme bang. We had the MPs [Military Police], we had everybody over us like a roast because we were the only ones with them. The following morning an American owned up that he was going past in his jeep and had it across his thing, and it went off. If he had aimed, it couldn't have been

12:00 better, straight through the door. Fortunately there was nobody in the mess at the time. A bit of a witch hunt but we weren't guilty, but we were all looking at each other to see who it was. We weren't surprised if one of our blokes did do it, they'd do anything sometimes.

What did that weapon look like?

Like a little shot gun, about that wide. They now

12:30 have them as part of the M203, an M16 on top with M79 launcher underneath, very effective.

What was its range and capabilities?

Hundred, couple of hundred metres, far more, far further than you can throw a normal grenade. Also used as a shot gun, it had a

13:00 flesh head round, like a shot gun, a high explosive round and a phosphorous round. Yeah, good weapon.

And were, you mentioned you also had Owen guns and SLRs?

Yeah, we gave the Owen guns away, they were useless.

13:30 They might have been good in the close jungle, but from here to you, me to you away, any distance over that it's not good. We then got M16 SLRs. Our armourer, SLR or FM, whatever you want to call it, is a semi-automatic, of course you keep pulling them in. We, our armourer, actually adapted

14:00 all ours, cut the barrels down, all unauthorised modifications, shaved the seal off so they could also fire an automatic so if you have got a five-man patrol the point man, or the forward scout, really needs to be able to put down the maximum - comes into contact with - maximum 5lb in a short time. And going like that with a trigger is not maximum fire power. Extremely unauthorised modifications were taken.

14:30 Finished up getting authorised, but a few people shuddered when they found out about it. Mind you, it took a long time to find out we had done it. Then again, you would have to change over the weapon at every patrol because if you actually fired it and burnt the weapon out - burn the barrel out quickly. Yeah.

So can you tell me again, what was the gun like to begin with and what it looked like with the modification?

15:00 An SLR. You know the normal style military rifle the SLR, what they call the FN, which had a barrel about that long, and we cut off the muzzle end down about that long, we put the, there was a heavy barrelled FN which had a bigger magazine, we put that on and we cut, changed the seal on it, so instead of just firing

15:30 repetitious you press the button and it fired automatic, very effective. Very effective.

Was there any use for the sawn off bit?

No just threw it away, only a bit of metal.

And who OK'd that unauthorised ...?

I have never been quite sure, it just happened.

16:00 I think our armourer, I think he just did it off his own bat. Probably did one and said to the boss, John Murphy, "This thing works alright," and John Murphy probably said, "Well I haven't seen it, go and do it." We were pretty laid back in a lot of things we used to do, things you wouldn't get away with in a normal unit, but that's the nature of the unit. We

16:30 had vehicles over in the west and long range reconnaissance which was normal land rovers that had no resemblance to the normal land rover and none of them were authorised modifications. Extra water tanks put in them and everything else. Two years down the line, we'd put in and get the modifications agreed, but we'd do it, but if you waited for the system to do it you'd be waiting forever. Like the public service.

17:00 **I'd like to talk more about the gear that you had, but just to clarify before we get into that in more detail, you were at Nui Dat, and who were the men that were in your platoon?**

We had a squadron which is about 120 all ranks, OC was John Murphy, Major,

17:30 fantastic chap. 2IC [Second in Command] was Geoff Chipman. Three of the troop officers were ex-Diggers of mine that had gone through OCS [Officer Candidate School], Peter Shearman, Trevor Rodrick and Hood Ross. Very unusual in the army to have blokes like that. My - and we just had the four troops, all cut down into, each troop had four

18:00 patrols of five men, that's how we operated.

And who was in your four-man patrol?

Well being - at that stage being a SIG [Signaller], I used to alternate. My normal patrol was a bloke called Des Kennedy, Joe Urquhart, no, Joe was another patrol, Max Yeakan, who is in Adelaide and a bloke called

18:30 Dipso Wilson, he liked his drink, that's a story in itself, and the other one varied. But I used to go out with a lot of other patrols, if they didn't have a SIG, I would go out with them. The communication was the most important thing. There was no good going out in an area and getting, looking, observing the enemy, you've got to get the information back. It's not

- 19:00 easy operating radios in close proximity to the enemy, with antennas and that sort of stuff. So I used to go on a lot of – as a matter of fact I saw a bloke called Daryl Crouch, probably did more patrols than most of the others because of the nature – we went with patrols that we weren't attached in. No,
- 19:30 it was interesting. You wouldn't move very far in the day, you were so careful to move. They had some funny experiences. We had one patrol, I wasn't with them. What our system of movement, if you move in the day before last light, you'd move around
- 20:00 in a big circle and come back on the trail you had just come on. You'd observe that for a while to see that nobody was following you, if you were you'd ambush them then you would look for the biggest clump of bamboo or thicket you could find, and we'd go back and we'd crawl into it. A five-man patrol being out for seven, eight, ten days, and staying awake at night
- 20:30 doing sentry duty, obviously you wouldn't cope with doing anything after five days, so we all used to find a spare spot and go to sleep because if anyone was coming there you'd hear them a mile off because of the foliage. Any rate, one of these patrols had done that, in the early hours of the morning there was a hell of a ruckus around, and they found that a NVA [North Vietnamese Army]
- 21:00 Company had moved in and bivouacked around them, and were hiding in this little clump. Any rate, we hadn't heard anything from them for a while. If you don't come up with the normal schedule, radio schedule, you'd probably send a chopper [helicopter] over and listen on a sarbie, which is a hand – anyhow this chopper is going over the top and these blokes were down here and he's whispering, "For God's sake, go
- 21:30 away." This went on for about a day and a half until the NVA moved away. I am glad it wasn't me. But we had about two months after a very similar occurrence, we were in a high, and all the noise started, all the chattering of the Vietnamese. And, oh God, the odds of that happening twice, when we woke up we found it was a pride of monkeys that had moved into the trees. They sounded just like the locals.
- 22:00 So that was very relieved. Funny thing, when you looked back on it. It wasn't too funny at the time, bloody monkeys.

Well in camp, where you were set up, how were you set up, were you set up according to the patrols that you were in?

Yeah, lived with the patrol. Each patrol lived in their own tent, yeah.

- 22:30 As I said, the whole thing of the unit is that you rely on everybody, you live closely, you know what they do, you know as much as possible how they think, what they are liable to do. Yeah you, each patrol lived in their own environment. And even, the patrol I normally worked with, even the patrols that I went out with that I
- 23:00 didn't work with normally, I knew them very well any rate, so it wasn't a problem. When you, 120 blokes, you get to know each other over the year very closely, bearing in mind, with the exception of me, they had just finished three months in New Guinea doing the work and doing the same, pre-Vietnam training. So they were all a pretty close knit group.

How was the camp set out,

- 23:30 **what did it look like?**

Tents. Oh, we had a big marquee set up as a mess tent. We built a boozer, the wet canteen. Then we built a Sergeants'/Officers' Mess because we were told

- 24:00 by the task force that we had to, prior to that we all used the same one, tents with sand bags up to about that level all around it. Then we started digging pits out the back for – now we did, we only did a token job at that. One thing SAS is not very good at is digging holes. The
- 24:30 battalion goes out with trenching tools, we don't do any of that. Any rate, so we started digging holes, any rate, the night – two nights – the night before we got mortared, the task force. Most of the mortar rounds landed in our area and the artillery area. We had 11 blokes were wounded.
- 25:00 I remember sitting on the end of the bed and hearing this sound and somebody said, "Is that incoming or outgoing." 'Bang!' incoming. So we were immediately out the back end of, into this pit which was woefully made, it was only about this deep. I did a count and found out we were one bloke short so I crawled back into the tent on my stomach to see if he was OK. He wasn't there
- 25:30 so I backed out. When it all finished, I found out this bloke had gone out the other flap and ran about 100 metres to another pit and got in there. I kicked his rear end all around the camp. In fact I had to get out and go and see where he was. With SOPs [Standard Operating Procedures] you just went out one side your own tent, and this bloke just admittedly he was on that side, but God knows why he ran 100 metres to go to another pit when there was one about 15 metres
- 26:00 away. The following morning, you have never seen so many shovels flying in all your life as our pits got dug a lot deeper. We never had to use them again, but we had some – one bloke had his eye removed, and the doctor in the hospital said it was as if it had been removed with a scalpel, it was just – with a

piece of shrapnel. Not a mark anywhere else, just a little

26:30 nick there, unbelievable.

So going back to the description of the camp and how it was laid out, you had the mess tent, the wet canteen and where you ...?

Tents all around.

The trenches. And what were your sleeping quarters like?

They were tents, just normal tents, the old Second World War style,

27:00 which were quite good for up there actually.

How many men in a tent?

Normally had five or six, normally five. Yeah. They were quite comfortable, we used to knock up old ammunition cases and make chairs, bookcases, we had all the mod cons, that you tend to do in that environment. We made a movie theatre, outdoor

27:30 movie theatre, which was extremely funny, the theatre of course faced into the camp, so of course it couldn't be seen from our side. And we were showing a movie this particular night called 'The Lost Command' with Anthony Quinn about the La Paras in Algeria and they have got all these mortars lined up ready to fire and the rifts on the - and as he goes like that and drops the first one down,

28:00 everything went haywire around the perimeter, and we had tracing going everywhere, it was almost like it had been orchestrated, and it was the funniest thing I have ever seen in my life, best sound effects. No, it was interesting.

What did you have around the perimeter of your camp?

Well we finished up, we had units all round outside of us, we didn't

28:30 man a perimeter at night, because of the nature of, because of the way we worked. We were right on the perimeter initially and then they pulled us in so we were right next to the task force HQ so we were probably in as much of a protected place as you could be. So we didn't have to, you can't man pits at night and gun points and do five man patrols during the day, there's not enough people to start with.

29:00 So we would have had, half the squadron would be out on patrols at any one time. Except for Christmas 1966, when we had every patrol in the squadron out, and that was the time we came out, they brought back all patrols on the battalion everything that was being brought back on the task force, so they could celebrate Christmas and SAS, we spent our, 3 Squadron, every patrol went out, in fact we

29:30 made up an extra patrol from the cooks and the clerk, and the pay clerk, Billy Nagle, who wrote 'One Angry Shot' ['The Odd Angry Shot'], would have gone out on that. Any rate, we came back and I can't remember if it was the 29th or 30th, something had happened, somebody threw a punch, would have been over drinks, the next minute the whole squadron

30:00 was having a punch up. We had engineers hanging over the fence, the medics hanging over another fence, all clapping. The funniest thing you have ever seen in your life. Why it happened, I still don't know, none of us can remember, but it just happened, just letting off steam. 'One Angry Shot', I must look at it again,

30:30 quite educational.

You said made chairs out of, makeshift chairs, what did you make them out of?

Ammunition boxes, wooden ones. We'd go and steal all the wooden ammunition boxes from the American, Australian Artillery. Most of us at this stage were wearing American camouflage outfits which we had either conned, stolen - sorry, appropriated.

31:00 We'd - anything that wasn't, you know. In fact we were the only unit, we had a juke box, and considering the Vietnamese weren't allowed in our area at all, it wasn't until about six months after we had this juke somebody asked, "How did the juke box get in here and how is it serviced?" We used to smuggle this bloke in to service our juke box, blindfold him in and take him out again.

31:30 We had a lot of entrepreneurial skills in the end. We made ourselves very comfortable, as much as you can. It was very miserable, not too good in the wet, wasn't very long anyhow. Another thing a lot of us, people don't realise, during the summer, the heat, the dry in Vietnam, it does get very dry, you can walk for days without finding water at all, so when you went out on

32:00 patrol, operation, it was worse because you had to carry twice as much water as you normally would because you couldn't get re-supply. Now people just think of the tropics, it's wet all the time, but it wasn't that way at all. Areas where we were it got very dry.

Well talk us through the daily routine and how you would be

32:30 **briefed for your patrol?**

You mean a patrol? Well you would get a warning order, that you were going on a patrol. Then you would have the patrol commander, the patrol 2IC, there would only be three others in the patrol, would get a, be told the area we were going into. Then we would have a briefing with the whole patrol by the operations officer.

33:00 Now this is again different to the battalion, the battalion went on operations, only the commander of the platoon or section would be told but everybody was briefed at the same time because there were only five of you anyway. You would be told how you were going to go in, if you had a problem with that you could bring it up. All stages of the planning process of an operation, anyone on the patrol

33:30 could have input or come up with a suggestion, the boss didn't necessarily have to agree with it. But it's a good idea, because there's always somebody who thinks of something that hadn't been thought of so you, hopefully you catch all eventuality. Then you would get all your gear, test fire your weapons, make sure all your maps are alright, make sure your gear was right, all the

34:00 codes, and everything we did was coded, nothing was sent in plain language. Then you'd go to, if you are going in by chopper you would go to the landing pad, 9 Squadron would pick you up into an area and the normal process there was one chopper for a patrol, it was just a single patrol,

34:30 two gun ships, you'd go into the landing zone. Go in, choppers would go across, they would go very quickly so nobody would know where you had been dropped. In the jungle you really can't tell where it is, you can hear it, but you can't tell where it is, it could be anywhere in a 360 degree

35:00 area. They'd go, we'd move off. If you went into an LZ [landing zone] and it was a hot LZ, in other words the enemy was already there, and you would come under fire, then you would make an assessment, you would either call the chopper back in and get out quick smart, or you may head off in a different direction and try and evade sort of thing, it depended on the

35:30 occasion. Once you have moved, then you, and as I said we used to move very slowly so we made no sound and the fact that you could hear anything else around you and watch for ambushes, you never used tracks, because that's what they used. We moved, you'd stop for cold lunch.

36:00 Then we'd do at night, we'd do the procedures I explained before, around the - so forth. You'd wake up first thing in the morning, before first light, and we'd go on, make sure nobody was around, and then we'd move off and you may stop about 10 o'clock and have a brew up, depending on where you were, if you thought you were reasonably safe. And that was your routine.

36:30 Things you didn't do, you never used any soap before you went out on a patrol, you never took cigarettes, never used any sort of deodorant or after-shave because they smell a mile off in the bush. Nobody used hair oil or anything like that. In a battalion you don't have to worry about it because you would hear them a mile off. But no, that was basically it. If your patrol area was

37:00 covered and your time frame was up, you would then normally get in the last, and we used to have set schedules, you would come on the radio at certain times, so each patrol would come up at their time frame so one patrol is not sitting in when another, , on the scheds [schedules], the last

37:30 day or two days before they would probably say, "Alright, you got open slather," so you could do what you like. If you had seen something that looked like a good ambush or something to have a go at, you would set up an ambush, hit them and run like hell to the choppers that are going to pick us up. Run like hell, that's literal because nearly every time you have contact, you are outnumbered, vastly outnumbered.

38:00 So it was a matter of what we called 'shoot and scoot'. It worked, we didn't lose too many, as a matter of fact my squadron we only lost one bloke, Russell Copeland, he died later of wounds, the youngest bloke in the squadron, Russell. And that was the sort of routine, you'd get back the LZ and it was the same as the pick up, sorry, the drop off. Two gun ships

38:30 pick you up. What they'd normally say, the chopper would come in, you'd throw smoke grenade, the chopper would identify, 'I SEE BLUE, I SEE RED, I SEE GREEN SMOKE.' Then he'd come in, if he had seen red smoke and you had thrown yellow, he wouldn't come in, he'd head off to another

39:00 LZ. The Viet Cong, which were predominantly down there, if they were in an LZ and they saw a chopper come in they would throw smoke deliberately to think that the chopper would come in, but that way you'd identify it. You'd go back, have a de-brief and get cleaned up and you'd have a final de-brief and that stage you'd hit the boozier.

39:30 And that was a patrol.

What colour flare did you throw for the pick up?

Depended on what you wanted. We'd carry all different colours, you would just throw any one, say it was white, red, yellow, and whoever was coming would identify, 'I see red smoke,' or green smoke. The chances of anyone else using the same colour smoke was pretty remote and if he'd seen two lots of

40:00 red smoke he would soon say, "Well, I have seen two red," and I would say, "Well I have only thrown one in that area," so, again the same scenario. But it worked, worked well.

And what sort of pre-designated pick up point would you have?

You'd have to have that all worked out before you went out, your infiltration LZ and your exportation LZ. The way we did it that is where the expression 'phantoms of the jungle' come from, the Vietnamese, they had propaganda, they

40:30 put out publications, they put money on people if they were captured, and they called them phantoms of the jungle, that's where it came from. Pretty pretentious, but still, 'Boy's Own Annual' stuff.

Tape 5

00:31 **Could you just define for me the types of patrols that you undertook?**

Basically, the main role with SAS and still is unless you are in a counter terrorist role, is reconnaissance, identify the enemy, then hopefully bring in the big guns to deal with them. Our main role was reconnaissance.

01:00 We did purely ambush patrols, an area we had been in before and we knew something was happening, we'd send in another patrol. Sometimes we'd send in two patrols together to beef up the odds so we'd have two men on the ground to purely ambush. Reconnaissance patrols, as I said, invariably at the end of your patrol, if

01:30 it wasn't going to compromise the fact that you had been in the area, they would say, "Right, have some fun," and you would set up an ambush or whatever you do to actually going and look for something to do. We had a couple, a few search patrols, and in other words going into a hamlet and one patrol would secure the area and we would go

02:00 through, check for traps and hidden tunnels and that sort of stuff. But basically it was revolved all around reconnaissance, that's what we did, everything else is just gravy. It's interesting after having said that, when 3 Squadron came back from Vietnam, we had more confirmed kills than the battalions combined, and that's with five-man patrols,

02:30 mainly because we were in the area where they were. A Battalion goes on operation, the enemy hears them coming, so they are going to go somewhere. We go out, they don't know where we are and that's the advantage, and by the same token, if they go out we don't know, it's the reverse. So that was basically it. Reconnaissance patrols and at the end of it you do a bit of ambush or

03:00 harassment or whatever you do. Every now and then we'd have a straight ambush patrol. Or, for instance the High Hills, we knew there was a counter sign, Viet Cong radio station, and we sent three patrols well spread to specifically look for that radio station and found it. That was

03:30 primarily, that was the job. That's what they did.

How long would you be out on patrol?

Depends, it would depend on the time of year, whether it was dry, wet and what the job was. It would normally be between five, seven perhaps, sometimes nine or ten days,

04:00 but that was relying on what you could carry. Bearing in mind that you didn't want to get re-supplied because as soon as you get re-supplied you are pinpointing where you are, there's somebody there. With the battalion it doesn't matter. 900 blokes wandering around the bush, you know they are there, but it really relied on the re-supply and how much you could carry.

And what resources would you put on the environment

04:30 **that you were in?**

In what respect?

I am just thinking, would you use the environment, the jungle that you were in, would you utilise any resources in there for food or ...?

No, no, very rarely anything there in a lot of cases. I mean, you had deer, apart from deer, but you couldn't use them for game, as soon as you have

05:00 fired a shot you have had it. We didn't have fires, not open fires, sometimes we had a little, in fact sometimes we would use plastic explosive which burns very fast and boils water very fast, no smell but slightly illegal but it worked very well. So there's not a lot that you could - 2 Corps when I was up there later

05:30 with MAT Force [Mobile Advisory Training Force], we certainly did then but it was a different kettle of

fish, but with SAS you can't, you use what you took with you, and what you took in with you, you also carried out, so you didn't leave any traces. We never dug holes to bury refuse, we'd take a bag with us and carry it out so nothing was left there to say we'd been there.

What time of the day would you conduct patrols?

06:00 You would start at first light and go through to last light.

During the night, who kept guard?

Nobody. That's what I am saying. At night before your last light, you would swing back on your trail, and we'd sit there for half an hour and make sure nobody was following us and once you had ascertained that,

06:30 you would have identified the biggest thickest clump of bamboo or scrub you could find, we'd all go up there and burrow, virtually burrow and all go to sleep. The principal is that if you are out there for 10 days, if there's five of you, you would be absolutely beat by three or four days if you are sentry at night. Anyone comes near you, you are going to hear them a mile off, better than a sentry. Mind you, you

07:00 occasionally got a sharp elbow in the ribs if you even looked like coming out with a snore or a cough, the bloke would dig at you. Never had any problems with that at all, except for the time when I was in a patrol in a bush and an NVA company moved and bivouacked around us for about 18 hours.

How did they stay silent for that whole time?

I don't know, but they

07:30 did.

What techniques would you employ to stay silent in those types of situations?

Well we very rarely talked at all, it was all sign language. Sometimes you had to, and it would be whispering in each other's ear, especially when you are doing a communication sched, because you are working at what you are going to write in your message and encoding it and one time letter pad and that sort of stuff. So you had to talk then, but bearing in mind that when you set

08:00 up your sched, your radio, you as sure as you possibly could be that you are in a reasonably secure environment, you wouldn't set up otherwise. But other than that all movements through the bush was by sign language, if you wanted someone to come to you, you patted your head.

Actually could you take me through some of the sign language?

08:30 Well that's come to me right. That's, I am going to have a look over there. You, over there, friendlies, enemy, self explanatory. Turn around if you are on a track, veer off to either side, go to ground.

09:00 Probably a lot more, I can't remember them now.

What was stop and go?

Yeah, well stop was and go was - underarm.

And I had read some of the SAS actually attached string to their fingers to lead themselves?

Do, do what?

To lead, actually

09:30 **attached string and they would - that was to travel through the night?**

Why?

To travel through the night.

No, you didn't travel at night in Vietnam. I don't know of any squadron that travelled at night in Vietnam. We did do similar things like that in training prior to Vietnam. Like, a squadron may have done it but I don't know.

How would you describe your

10:00 **enemy?**

A mixture, some of them were very good and some of them were slack. Some of them moved in a track for instance, with hardly any noise, and others you would hear them a mile off. If they are purely combatants, they are normally pretty good. If they were local Viet Cong, they weren't very good. NVA were very, very good

10:30 but they were very limited in their communications. Later, when I was up at Dugoi and they attacked the A camps - I'll talk about that later. You could always predict if they were going to attack, they were going to do it one way, because they had to plan it so much because they didn't have communications

between different groups whereas we had flexibility, you could change whatever you were doing by the radio. They had a degree of communication but

11:00 not very much. They were dedicated, they did some very nasty things just after I got up there, they, south of Baria, they had gutted a little seven year old girl, slit her right up the middle, and they did that deliberately because a

11:30 medical aid team in Baria had been doing a lot of work and the Vietnamese community had been coming along side with them, and they did that purely so that the medical team would come out at night and they could ambush them. That happened about three weeks after I arrived in country and it put a different scenario completely in my eyes.

12:00 At that stage I was only out there just for a job, but I thought that anybody that can do a thing like that, there's got to be something wrong with them. That's what they did.

And the ambushes?

They didn't get them, they didn't get the medical team. They wounded an MP with them but that was it, didn't get the doctor, yeah, and the kid was fixed up and safe, I don't know what happened to her after, but yeah.

12:30 Pretty horrendous, I can't imagine anybody doing a thing like that, but worse things have happened and probably will.

And your own ambushes, how were they conducted, like were there different types of ambushes?

No we actually – SAS ones? No, I can't think of – 3 Squadron, we didn't ambush any road, we ambushed tracks. Bearing in mind that

13:00 the locals were supposed to keep out of that, so that anything in that local area you could pretty safely say was the enemy. They always used tracks to move from point A to point B, all their portage, all their equipment and food would move on these tracks either on bicycles or pannikins or poles but they were fair game, you would

13:30 set up an ambush on them. Yeah. We had one that is in the book, called 'The Tractor Job', they were moving gear with a trailer behind it. We ambushed that, rather successfully, yep.

You spoke earlier about when you went out on patrol and not have any overt smells, how were you actually dressed?

Just straight greens,

14:00 army greens until we appropriated other stuff from the Americans.

Just the Americans ...?

Well they were the only ones with camouflaging equipment. We actually dyed most of our greens, we put them, made them, tried to camouflage them. We didn't have any camouflage gear in those days but the point is that once you are out

14:30 in the bush for a while, the greens, your greens, the old army jungle greens, were almost black through perspiration and that. Hats, most of ours wore a camouflage sweat band around the forehead but that was an individual choice. It was an individual choice what you carried, I mean you could carry whatever you liked, as long as you carry your weapons and

15:00 ammunition and so forth. How you carried it was up to you, how you dressed was up to you. Sometimes we looked like a pack of pirates but it worked.

How did you prefer to dress?

I used to wear greens, but I obtained a what you called a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] belt, an automatic rifle belt the Americans had in the Second World War which had all pouches around it with a quick release, and I used to have

15:30 my ammunition on there and carried a Bergen rucksack which had all my gear and radio in there. No, it was quite good. Actually I think it was lucky, because I think there was only about two of us who were able to con the BAR belts but I am not sure how I got mine, but I got one.

And what were the supplies that you carried with you?

We started off with the Australian 25 ration packs, which were little tins of stuff

16:00 and so forth, then later we got hold of American LRRP [pron Lurp] Packs, which were American long range reconnaissance packs which was the dehydrated stuff which you added water to. They were quite nice, light but bulky. The other stuff wasn't as bulky but it was heavy so we preferred the LRRP Packs but again if it was the dry season, you had a problem with water to regenerate them.

16:30 **Please don't take this as a very personal question, but I am quite curious that when you moved on you could not leave any markings of having been there, how did you go to the toilet?**

Well, you would urinate if you had to,

17:00 but you very rarely because of the rations needed to go while you were out there. In other words you come back after seven days rather 'full in the face'. You were very, occasionally somebody would have to and then you would dig a little ditch with a machete and you would really make sure it was covered up. It is something that I have forgotten about

17:30 but, strangely enough, I can't think of a patrol I went out on that I actually had to do that. We did a - and smells, we did a patrol, Des Kennedy, it was a normal patrol, at the top of Nui Dat, not Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province, coming into

18:00 a, where a river flowed along the top. And we stopped, any rate, and it started to, on the bank of the river, it started to, foliage started to thin out. We were - and I was sitting, kneeling, on one leg near a tree and I thought, and I said to Des,

18:30 he came over, and it was urine, one of the locals had just urinated against the tree. So we moved very, very, very carefully forward just to see, on the other side of the river, three columns of Vietnamese, one going that way and the other going that way going out, they had just moved out of the area. If we had been there 20 minutes earlier we would have bumped right into them. But I could smell urine on the tree, that's how I could tell,

19:00 mind you, urine has got a strong smell anyway but it made us particularly careful. I thought, 'What the hell is that smell?' and ol' Des said, "Yeah, you are right." Especially careful.

You said before when you were describing your enemy that some were very, very good, how close did some of the VC [Viet Cong] get?

In what way?

How close to you, to your patrol?

19:30 Here to that door away. Not very often, that's just when we were watching them on the trail. In a lot of cases in a reconnaissance, it was just a matter of observing them, counting them, know where they are going and what they were carrying and letting that information get back. Normally it was further away but I suppose the closest would be from here to that door. Mind you, I was very well hidden

20:00 at the time. And I am sorry, that was not right, I wouldn't have been from here to there, but the bloke who was actually doing the OP [observation post], I was back a bit. We normally had one bloke up close and the rest covering him sort of thing, but from here to that door.

You actually sound like you were quite a successful squad for a foreign environment, as this was their natural terrain and you had mastered it

20:30 **quite well.**

Well the difference is, don't forget the average Vietnamese is an average urban dweller, very few of them live in the bush. We practice in the bush all the time, so it was more natural to us than it was to them. Very, very few Vietnamese live in, even those that live in the country live in paddy fields and, they don't live in the jungle, Montagnards do but the Vietnamese don't so

21:00 to them it's not a natural environment and for us it is. Again, bearing in mind that nearly everyone in the SAS [who] went to Vietnam, they had been training and training together for years in that environment. New Guinea is a good area to train, I mean we are the only unit that trained in New Guinea prior to going to Vietnam, all the others went to Canungra. This business about the Vietnamese being jungle

21:30 fighters is a bit of a myth, they really weren't, that's why they never went off tracks, they get lost, most of them wouldn't have compasses, wouldn't have maps. A lot of myths about Vietnam, I'll tell you.

Well, if they didn't have maps and they didn't have compasses, what were their orders,

22:00 **what were they doing?**

They were just moving from point A to point B, to do that they move along a track. They would be told, 'Walk along that track, walk 2,000 paces, turn left, walk another 500 paces and you will find our base camp.' That's how they do it. Some of them had maps and some of them had compasses, the senior officers had maps, Viet

22:30 Cong didn't. Talk about the North Vietnamese Army is a different kettle of fish. We had maps for, in the latter part up in 2 Corps, but the Viet Cong, they were quite tenacious and they were dedicated but they weren't very well equipped in that respect, they didn't know their bush, some did, some of them occasionally, only a

23:00 woodcutter or a charcoal burner, and they still have charcoal burners in Vietnam or did in those days,

but invariably most of them lived in villages or cities and wouldn't go in the jungle at all.

You mentioned earlier the nickname 'Phantoms of the Jungle', how did you find out about that nickname?

It came out of one of the pamphlets

23:30 warning the locals about the, this mob putting a price on anyone that captured one or killed one and their nickname was so called 'Phantoms of the Jungle'.

How was that said in Vietnamese?

God knows, I have lost most of my Vietnamese. I used to be able to speak it reasonably well, but I

24:00 can't remember half of it.

How did you guys react when you saw that there was a bounty out?

It wasn't an individual bounty, it was just a bounty if somebody had been actually captured or killed, up north we actually had bounties on individual heads, but thought it was a big joke actually, what else would you do?

24:30 Didn't really mean much, as long as you did your job you were pretty right.

And did you think that nickname was appropriate for you?

We thought it was a laugh. 'Phantom of the Jungle', pretty pretentious isn't it?

But did you feel like Phantoms of the Jungle?

Not really, very grubby phantom.

25:00 **Going back to the patrols, you made mention about being dropped in by chopper, how did you be discreet about that?**

We didn't have to be. You would pick a landing zone where you were going to drop off, you would also pick up one or two alternatives so that if that one was compromised you would go to another one.

25:30 The choppers would come in above the ground at tree level, now if you are on the ground in that environment you can hear choppers but you don't know where they are, you can't pick up a location. There's really no difference in sound when a chopper comes in, drops people off and keeps going. So in that respect unless you have actually seen it's pretty remote

26:00 and bearing in mind you are only going into a clearing in the jungle. It has its problems because there were other ways of going in. We were going into one, one day and I really did my back in pretty badly at that stage and we were about, hovered about that high off the grass, and we jumped with the Bergen on the back and we all,

26:30 unbeknownst to us the grass was 15 foot high bent over, instead of jumping from there to there, we jumped with full kit on our backs about 13 ft probably, by the time we hit the ground. Thank God there was nobody down there or we would be dead. It just looked like normal grass but it was all high. So those sort of things threw the possum,

27:00 you know, they created a few problems but, , that was the only one ... we also sometimes went in by threes, the personnel carriers. Personnel carriers would be going out to do an operation and our blokes would just go out with the personnel carriers on operation and they would just drop off on the way, fade off into the jungle and the

27:30 carrier would just keep going. Sometimes if it was an area reasonably close you might walk in but walking those areas was obviously impractical with the time frame and what you had to carry, but normally it was by chopper.

What was your relationship like with the pilots?

Very good. When any of our blokes - most of our chaps had a day

28:00 off and go down to Vung Tau, instead of going and staying in the army environment, they would go and stay with 9 Squadron and stay at the RAAF base. 9 Squadron, the rapport with 9 Squadron and the SAS was very, very high. In fact, they were dedicated if we had a call on the choppers and they had other jobs, they were dedicated, they had to come out and get us.

28:30 We actually have two blokes from 9 Squadron march with us on Anzac Day instead of the air force. 9 Squadron were disbanded. The rapport was excellent, excellent. I can't think of one case where they didn't do their job or above what they should have done. No. No inter-service rivalry there I can tell you. They were extremely good.

You made mention earlier about the success of SAS

29:00 **and you having lost one man?**

That was 3 Squadron.

3 Squadron, sorry, how did Russell sustain his injuries?

They'd had a contact, I can't remember how the contact occurred, he was wounded about three times. A chap called, can't remember his Christian name, he was always known as Juvy, Juvenile, Juvy

29:30 Matten, he was a big bloke, bigger than I am, bulkier than I am, picked him up and carried him for five kms on his back to the LZ while the others brought up the tail. They got away OK. Russell Copeland was brought back to the hospital at Vung Tau. His father was in the Middle-East as a UN [United Nations] observer. They flew him back, that's how bad he was, his mother

30:00 up from Australia. He was, when he was strong enough they repatriated him back to Sydney, to Concord Hospital, and about just under two months later he died in hospital.

What were the injuries he sustained?

The abdomen, I

30:30 can't remember, the abdomen shoulder and arm, if I remember rightly. There's always - there's a bit of an investigation, it was believed, I don't know, it was never confirmed, in actual fact he was supposed to be recuperating quite well and he was given a wrong medication but that's one of those things, I don't know if it's true or not. That was a scuttle bug, but

31:00 again that rumours go around. But I think it was the fact that he was supposed to be coming good and so long after he came back that he died. But they had some remarkable - the medicos - we had a chap in 2 Squadron, 1 Squadron, a young Lieutenant Simpson, lost both his legs in a mine below the knees. Flew him out, he was in the base hospital until they got him ready to move, they brought him back

31:30 to Australia, the squadron came back to Swanbourne, four weeks, four or five weeks after he had been wounded, two days after the Squadron turned up, a Commonwealth car turned up out the front and Simpson got out and walked through the gates of Swanbourne Barracks on artificial legs. I think that's not bad, I think the whole thing from wounded to walking through was six weeks.

32:00 Both legs, fortunately for him both below the knee, so which is easier, but? Hard to contemplate isn't it?

When the men heard the news of Russell's passing, how did it affect the mood?

Can't remember really. Can't remember.

32:30 We were all pretty cut up about it to a degree as much as you can be, I mean, they all get pretty blasé about it. But no, it's just one of those things, another casualty of war. This business about the probably a hospital thing it hadn't spread at this stage, he just died of wounds, that's it, which is what he did

33:00 do. I really can't remember if there was any what I consider real problems about it. I think that Juvy Matten, the bloke that carried him out, was a bit cut up about it. The other thing I suppose, a little bit, was the fact that he was, the fact that he was the youngest in the squadron. I think

33:30 he was 19 at the time, no, he would have been 20, if he had have been 19 he wouldn't have been over there. So I really can't recollect any particular reaction about it, other than what you would expect. Nobody went around beating their breasts or tearing their hair out or that sort of stuff.

34:00 Next.

I was just thinking about de-briefing, , you mentioned that came back from patrol to a de-brief. What did debrief consist of?

Oh you just went through the whole patrol day by day, what actually happened, not all the routine, but if anything out of the ordinary had happened. But that was pretty basic, I mean, that was all put on the maps and anything you found,

34:30 and then any information went across to Task Force, to intelligence. Biggest problem was that by the time the information went from Task Force into intelligence and then it got to the intelligence people, then got to the battalion, what we had seen would have already gone which is why we started doing a reaction after, some of those areas we would go back in

35:00 and ambush ourselves, but just too long for the battalions to action which has always been a problem and always will be, reaction time. Yeah. No, it was as I said, just a general de-brief of the patrol, any pertinent things, anything particular, all your maps

35:30 would be, partly individual maps which we held all the time would be passed in the centre and things like that. Any problems with communication were brought out and thrashed out and remedy how we would fix them ... Any recommendations if you go into that area, different type of weapons should be taken for a particular thing, all that sort of stuff and that was carried forward.

- 36:00 They were very useful tool, the de-briefs, probably more so than the briefing itself because you could sit down and work out what you were going to do in most cases, but they would take, depending on the patrol, what happened, any activity, anything from an hour to four hours. They always did that before you got cleaned up so it was always fresh in your mind.
- 36:30 **How long on average would the reaction time be to go back in and conduct your own ambushes?**
- Well it would depend if we thought it was worthwhile and recommended it to the OC, John Murphy, to do it, he would clear it with Task Force and as soon as we had the asset, the choppers, we would be able to do it, so it could be anything from a couple of hours to a day.
- 37:00 Talking about the task force, it could be anything up to a week which is obviously – unless it was a base camp that you had found, then it's a different kettle of fish. It didn't happen very often but it did happen occasionally, where what we called a target of opportunity would come up and we would do that but we did one for a whole squadron except for one troop,
- 37:30 but that was – we found a series of caves in the mountainside were being used, so we got permission to do a squadron, the only one we know I think. Yeah so that was it.
- How did that ambush work?**
- Which ambush?
- The one you just talked about where you found the caves?**
- That wasn't an ambush, that was just moving in and checking the caves out and clearing the
- 38:00 caves. We found about five people there I think who were subsequently, three of them were killed and two got away. We found a lot of stores, a big cache there. It was also the same area where I mentioned there was a Viet Cong radio set up, was virtually in the same area. It was an area the Viet Cong treated very much as though it was their own, nobody went near it. I don't think the battalions went in there.
- 38:30 **And what did you pack for an ambush?**
- A lot of ammunition, no more than you normally take on a patrol except you might, if you are going in for a deliberate ambush you might take in a M60 machine gun, which is something that we normally didn't carry because of the weight and the
- 39:00 ammunition. If you are going in specifically for an ambush job you would probably take an M60. If you had two patrols combining for an ambush, you would probably have two M60s. I never actually went on a set ambush except just after we got to the rubber plantation, banana plantation, that didn't work out. But we did a few of them,
- 39:30 two were very successful, one they didn't see anyone. The ambushes I was involved in were opportunity ones after the end of a patrol which was a different kettle of fish, you are just using your normal weapons you carry on patrol.
- Sorry, could you explain that to me, an opportunity ambush?**
- At the end of a patrol you would get a message saying that you have done your patrol area, and we've got all the information,
- 40:00 you have got a day or 18 hours or whatever to wait before the chopper picks you up, and you get back to the LV, 'Anything in there that you think is a good opportunity to ambush or attack or whatever, be our guest.' So you would go along and say, "That's alright, we'll have a go at that." You set up, the track that's been used a fair bit, you would set up an ambush in there and just wait until someone comes along. And that's called an ambush of opportunity.

Tape 6

- 00:31 **We were talking about patrols with 3 Squadron on your first tour, I would just like to pick up again and ask what was in your long recon [reconnaissance] packs you took out with you?**
- What the average person carried? Well the weapons varied, you would have an SLR
- 01:00 converted with the automatic, which was unusual, we had M16s as weapons, some of us carried 9 mm pistols, but not very often, everybody had a compass and that, I, as the Patrol SIG, carried all of that, carried an HF [High Frequency] radio, a little 64 radio, looked like
- 01:30 a little lunch pail, an American lunch pail, sometimes a, what they called a 25 set which was a VHF [Very High Frequency] set. But also carried two what we called irk tins, which was about so big, which had a beacon in it, if you got into trouble you just pushed the beacon and the aircraft would home in on it, it also had the facility to talk from ground to aircraft,

- 02:00 for emergencies. You carried rations appropriate to the amount of time you were going out, and you were literally festooned with as many water bottles as you could carry. Everybody had a first aid kit. One member of the platoon, who was designated as the patrol
- 02:30 medic would carry a more comprehensive medical kit. We'd carry a tube of blood expander or plasma in case somebody was wounded and you had to put it into their veins. Your head dress depended on the individual, some wore goggle hats, some wore just a lot of us just wore the sweat band type thing
- 03:00 tied around the head, Indian style thing. We never carried bayonets but we always carried a knife of our own choosing. Only one person carried a machete.

What knife did you carry?

I carried two, I carried a flick knife stowed in the top of my boot for escaping an invasion and I

- 03:30 just carried a American K-bar, which is an American fighting knife, marine actually, marine. We all carried a panel, market panel, which was a little bit of iridescent cloth, which you could see from the top, we carried smoke grenades,
- 04:00 we carried, some of us carried M26 high explosive grenades. Sometimes one person would have an M79, that's the little grenade launcher. What else did we have? For sleeping we would normally just have the poncho, which we would never put up, we would just lay on the ground and wrap ourselves
- 04:30 up in it. They show up very, , you had always had mosquitoes, my repellent, water purifying stuff. That's about it I suppose, I can't think of anything else.

And how many water bottles would you carry?

Me, I used to carry one, two, three or four around my waist with the

- 05:00 pack and two on the other side of the Bergen and a big bladder. But again, it depended on what time of the year, if it was during the wet or there was plenty of water around, of course you would reduce that. The only time we carried a lot of water like that was if Charlie, the VC, would bivouac [camp] anywhere, always bivouac down by water. So you are more likely to bump into them there than anywhere else
- 05:30 so you kept away from it as much as possible. The idea was to observe them from a distance, not kiss them. So, but again it depended on the individual and the patrol, the type of patrol and the individuals in it. I can't think of anything else off hand we would have carried.

I would like to go back to the SIG equipment you just mentioned you were carrying, , how did it work?

- 06:00 In what way?

Well you just mentioned you had three ...?

No, the main means of communication was a high frequency PRC64, so big, that long and that high with a lid that opened up, it always off random Morse code, you had to put a wire in and antenna to use it, and that was the biggest

- 06:30 problem, anywhere, because as soon as you put out antennas, started hanging antennas, so we had to be reasonably secure and know our scheds. Sometimes we used, took the 25 set which is about the size of that container, about that high, that wide and about that thick, very heavy. We only took them when really had to, we normally just relied on the 24 set.
- 07:00 Then we had the irk tins which I said were about the size of a cigarette carton or half a cigarette carton, which was a beacon and also had the ability to talk between you and the aircraft, and they were the means of communication. And the other thing was your encryption,

- 07:30 everything you send had to be encrypted, everything you received had to be decoded and we used for that, we used a one time letter pad, which was one of the very few codes which is almost unbreakable, almost every other code is - very laborious, takes a while to do, but it is very, very effective. That was virtually what we carried.

What call signs did you use or ...?

- 08:00 Changed all the time, never used the same call signs. We changed call signs all the time and we changed frequencies all the time which is unlike a battalion, they use the same call signs.

And how did the terrain that you were moving in affect those communications on operations?

High frequencies didn't make any difference. As long as you put up the proper antenna to where you wanted it to operate, you normally got through, very rarely we never

- 08:30 got through. Might not have been particularly good, but the fact that we were using Morse, see, you'll

get through on Morse code to areas where you will never get through on using voice communications. That's why it is such a specialised thing in SAS.

And how often would you need to call in or ...?

You would normally have two scheds a day, minimum, and in our

09:00 case we always had a radio operator back at base on a set on a frequency, an emergency frequency, not listening to normal scheds and he would be there listening and he would come up on the emergency frequency. You could use that for a lot of things, no normal routine, but real emergencies. Yeah, but again it worked very well.

09:30 **You say you change frequencies a lot, was there a frequency that was safer than the others or ...?**

No, you just made sure you moved around. No, you didn't change frequency all the time on a patrol, at each patrol you went on you used a different frequency and a different call sign but we also had a procedure that

10:00 if we thought the call sign or the frequency was compromised then we would go to a different one, changed the call sign and changed the frequency.

How would you know it was compromised?

If, for argument sake, you found out that somebody had lost the paperwork that had those things listed on it, I mean very rarely.

10:30 We had a case of a young lieutenant, not in my squadron, a latter squadron in Vietnam, who [was] actually doing a reconnaissance before a patrol, before [they] went out, and lost his map out of the aircraft into the jungle and didn't report it initially until somebody found out about it, and when they found about it the fact that he didn't report it, he was immediately sent out of the, sent away from the unit

11:00 to another unit. It wasn't the fact that he lost the thing but the fact that he didn't report it, but that could have compromised a whole patrol. These things happen. The fact is, you are compromised in that respect in frequencies, is very unlikely that you would know about.

11:30 Anything else?

And I am just curious about the different call signs, can you remember just one example of one of the call signs?

Not really, they just changed. Whiskey, Bravo, Sierra, Mike, whatever you wanted to call it, we just had a list of call signs we wanted to make up.

And when you were speaking about the enemy when you were calling in, how would you refer to them? What names would

12:00 **you ...?**

You never use voice, it would be all Morse code and it would be encrypted. If you are writing in a thing, writing a message, then you would encrypt, you would put 2 E N S I T, grid number, 5 L W 7

12:30 H W, light weapons, heavy weapons, you could abbreviate it down to a, pretty well so everyone knew what you were talking about, authorised abbreviations and some we made up ourselves, as long as everyone used the same one you were pretty right.

How truthful is it - I mean one of the images circulating about the SAS

13:00 **is that they wore face kind of camouflage, how kind of true is that?**

Well yeah, you do, you wear face camouflage. Most of us, well all of us, as soon as you got a warning order of going out, never shaved to start with. That did two things, it saved you from using any soap or shaving cream, it also, whiskers,

13:30 unless you have got real blond or real white, are a good face camouflage because they break up the outline of your face, but you would find you could use cam [camouflage] cream out in the bush, it was right to a degree but you got that dirty anyway all you were doing was breaking up the outline of your face. You know you use it, most people used it.

And what was cam cream what ...?

Just a grey and green cream to

14:00 smear on your face to break up the outline of your face. Yeah. So that's standard, that's standard operation.

And the other standard you have just mentioned in your pack, you carried some medical

equipment or I think you mentioned a pouch of blood?

What they call blood expander. Just

- 14:30 what you would do, if somebody was badly wounded, you would break it open, you got it in a plastic phial with plasma in it, for a better word, put the needle into their veins, so if they are bleeding profusely it expands the blood and they don't die of blood loss, theoretically that's the reason, and the other thing we carried phials of morphine with them
- 15:00 which incidentally even the medics in the army aren't supposed to carry. We also had a, which I never mentioned, we had a special, run by the School of Army Health, an SAS Med-A course which covered things that the normal medic in the army didn't cover, because of the nature of what we used to do. We never carried it as far but for instance American Special Forces medics
- 15:30 were covered to do amputations and that, we weren't trained to that extent. I would say some of them would have tried it if they needed to but the Americans were actually trained for it. American Special Forces, their medics. They do things that doctors would do.

Well how extensive was your medical training?

I never did the long Med-A course. I only just did the normal medical stuff, which is pretty,

- 16:00 get you out of trouble, tourniquets and all the pressure points and treating wounds and that sort of stuff. But the Long Med-A course, the SAS, the Med course was very, very good, they would go over the hills well they do the course and normally come back and do three months' secondment in the casualty centre at the Royal Perth Hospital, on job training, so they have seen some pretty horrendous things. I never did that,
- 16:30 I am not quite sure whether I am sorry I didn't, or whether I am glad or not.

What was the procedure for calling in the medic when you were out on patrol and something happened?

If you got contacted that badly, there was somebody badly injured, then you would call in, you would get on the set and call in the choppers. Depends on which LV you were going to land in and you make for that and get picked up. If it was a real

- 17:00 emergency, you would probably get a chopper in and winch somebody out on a harness. But normally you would try and carry him back to the LV.

How often did that happen on your patrols?

Didn't, only Russell Copeland and he was carried back to the LV. We were very lucky, he was the only casualty apart from the 11 blokes with the,

- 17:30 at the, when we were mortared. On operational patrol, Russell Copeland was the only one wounded with our squadron. We had subsequent blokes killed but not very many though.

It is surprising.

No, it's good training. I am, no seriously, that's the main reason.

- 18:00 **I mean the average bloke in SAS had been trained in the job for years doing the same thing whereas the bloke in the Battalion had only been doing it three or four, five or six months. There is a hell of a lot of things that you do instinctively because you have been doing it for that often. The chances are, if an SAS patrol was ambushed, the chances of getting out of the ambush successfully would be about 100% more**

- 18:30 **than it would if a section of the Rifle Company got ambushed, purely because of the training. That's one of the reasons the selection course is so high.**

You mentioned earlier that 3 Squadron had a very high number, I will use your word, 'killed', on the patrols that you were on ...

Don't ask me, I can't remember, I really can't remember.

- 19:00 Um, no. Um. Nup, I have no idea. Not all that many indirect fire fights. Some of them were killed, some of the jobs we would do, you would be in an area and see a concentration of enemy and then you would call in artillery right on top of
- 19:30 them. Now you are credited to a degree with those kills, so were the battalions, because if you weren't there and directed the artillery fire they wouldn't have got them anyway. So a lot of it was that and air strikes, but I don't know how many individuals of the patrol, we had three major ambushes, no, two major ones, probably about a dozen
- 20:00 that I can think of in front of me, that's not me personally. I don't know if I killed anyone in essence with 3 Squadron. In fact I don't know whether any of us had fired, because some of us probably fired at the

same bloke, and you were never actually sure who hit who. So anyone goes around and says, "I - ,," unless he's the only person aiming at someone, nobody else, you are never really sure whether you killed

- 20:30 him, hit him. Makes sense. I hear some very strange stories coming out about other people. It doesn't work that way, and it takes a lot of rounds to hit somebody. I have seen a bloke run across in front of a Montagnard Company, a whole company shooting at him, and not touched.

I was going to ask you, when you were out on those five-man

- 21:00 **patrols, what was the chain of command?**

The patrol commander was the leader. 2IC, you had a pecking order, you always worked, if something happened to somebody, somebody else would automatically take over. It never really became a problem because everybody else just instinctively did what they were supposed to do and like everything else, you get the scenario, if somebody, like the

- 21:30 orders brief, if anybody had a thought or wanted to put something in on the orders brief, they were quite welcome to bring it up at any time and everybody would listen, you didn't have to do what they suggested but you would do it and even though the patrol commander was in charge, he would always listen to what the others had to say.

How would that - I mean, a five-man patrol is very small, so you have still got a forward scout and somebody doing sigs?

- 22:00 You are on your patrol, your forward scout goes first, your patrol comes second, your SIG comes third and the other two bring up the rear end. Right, now it depends on who they are in the composition of the patrol. You might find for instance, sometimes, the patrol commander goes out, is a corporal of the patrol, the

- 22:30 one of the other two patrol members at the rear end, one of them might be a sergeant who is just filling in for a patrol member because somebody is ill or something. So, instead of the patrol 2IC, normal 2IC, taking over, the sergeant might, we'll work out that he'll take over if something happens. But it was all very flexible, it's gotta be, but generally speaking,

- 23:00 the normal position was patrol commander, patrol 2IC, the patrol, next rifleman, the SIG was very rarely given that responsibility because he had too much to do at any rate. The SIG normally got the hardest job in the patrol, because when you stop he's sending out coms [communications],

- 23:30 he's carrying the biggest load, he's, whenever you stop he's making up the signal to send out on pads, he's sending the stuff, he packs up and you all move. He is so busy he doesn't have time to do it, somebody else prepares his meals because he doesn't have time to do it. So from the time you get up in the morning until the time you stop at night, that one patrol member never stops working. They are all working all the time but they are always watching what is going on.

- 24:00 But physically never, doesn't have time to make up a brew, he has to rely on someone else to do it for him. So obviously unless it is special circumstances, the SIG does what he is supposed to do, operate the signals. Clear as mud.

No, it's actually, that's a very good description, I am clear now. I am

- 24:30 **then wondering, given you as the SIGs would have so much to do, that you are constantly occupied, when you would make, on the occasions that you might make contact with the VC, who would it be, the forward scout that would make ...?**

It would depend where the contact is made, if it is in the front, the forward scout would normally fire. He would -

- 25:00 then go to ground. Then you would make an appreciation of what has happened and the patrol commander would say, 'We either get out of here because there is too many of them or we would engage them.' At that stage you would all become riflemen. The SIG, just, you don't worry about communication at that stage, you worry about that when you break the contact, you just become another weapon.

- 25:30 **And how often did you see the VC?**

Not all that often. I would say you would only, you probably see them, or sight them, every patrol, you would only come across groups every second or third patrol. You would only have a contact every now and then.

- 26:00 I am talking about an individual patrol. But I have been out on, I went out on, I can think of two patrols in particular that we seen absolutely nothing. Very relieved, may I add, but no, there are patrols that you never see, same as with a, if you look at the overall figures of Vietnam with the troops there and even the

- 26:30 rifle battalion, I don't know but I would suggest you would be lucky if one in 20 blokes in a rifle platoon ever fired his weapon in action but they don't say anything. Mind you, the others make up for it, but a

lot of it is just repetitious work and just going out and doing your job. The fact that you go out there sometimes and you really wonder whether you want to find something

27:00 or whether you don't want to, either way it is satisfying, if you don't find anything you know there is nothing in the area to worry about but that's the job too, that's reconnaissance.

When you first went to Vietnam, who were you expecting to fight?

Fight. Viet Cong. See what was down there. Phuoc Tuy Province had nearly all

27:30 Viet Cong, local force units. I think the main, if I remember rightly, the main unit in Phuoc Tuy was a local force platoon D445 which was one of the units at Long Tan. We followed up all the trails after Long Tan, we went out and followed up all the blood trails and that, and looking for bodies, we didn't find too many bodies, but found a lot of blood trails,

28:00 they carried everything away if they could, but the second time it was all NVA, North Vietnamese Army.

And I guess, what did you and the squadron perceive of the Viet Cong as an enemy?

28:30 I think we had a healthy respect for them, but as I said they weren't very good in the bush and they didn't have the strength in down at Phuoc Tuy to do a hell of a lot of damage except when they brought people in for that big ambush at Long Tan. But no, they were quite good for what they - and bearing in mind they were all just local volunteers,

29:00 they weren't regular army or anything.

So that tour lasted approximately nine months, one thing

29:30 **that you have mentioned that might have got you through was a sense of humour, how did that play out in the squadron?**

I don't think anybody took themselves seriously, if that's what you mean. We were all pretty light-hearted when we weren't. They played hard, they worked hard and they played hard, they were pretty good in that respect. The only time I ever saw anybody get really

30:00 peeved off was when we were coming home and because of the fact that we came home earlier than the battalions did. The HQ AFV, Australian Forces of Vietnam, just said to us, the Squadron Commander, John Murphy, "Take your squadron and go home," and he said, "When will we go?" He said, "Make your own way home." So we sent

30:30 a group, myself and two others to Saigon. Every aircraft that was going out that we could find places for, we just radioed back to the unit and said, "Send up two packs or three packs and put them on." Murphy and Mick Wright, the Senior CSM [Command Sergeant Major], were the last out of there. I was the third last out, I went out before they did. I got out on a Pan Am flight.

31:00 And flew with Pan Am to Singapore, my flight marrying up from Singapore to Perth fouled up so Pan Am put me up at the Singapore Hotel until they could get an onward flight to Perth. Ten days later I was still at the Singapore Hotel, compliments of Pan Am. I was single, it didn't worry me. They finished up getting me on an Air India flight

31:30 to Perth, of which there were five people on it, with 15 crew, best flight I have ever done in my life, but that's how we got back. I have never had anything happen like that before. Yeah, 'Just make your own way back,' and we got them back on Hercules' any way we could. I am not sure whether it was supposed to be an initiative exercise. We did it though.

32:00 Unbelievable isn't it? Yeah, 'Make your own way home.'

It was a very unusual ...?

Well nobody believed it when they said it. I would have loved to have been in HQ when they told John Murphy, he would have done his steam but no, find your own way home, that's how he did it.

What kind of OC was John Murphy?

Absolutely superb, lovely bloke.

32:30 Sauvé Kohn we called him. He had everything going for him, good looking, charming, debonair, good soldier, he was the epitome of everything you would want. He finished up dying a horrible death, he finished up being - he was a heavy chain smoker, he finished up with cancer of the throat and they cut his tongue out, and he finished up dying with it.

33:00 But no, lovely bloke, you couldn't have asked for a nicer bloke or a good boss.

Well in hindsight now, looking back on that tour with 3 Squadron, what do you think the key to your success for those patrols?

Training. You might moan and groan, we might moan and groan about repetitious training but it pays in the long run. Most of the

33:30 stuff was done unexpectedly, we didn't have to think about it, we just did it and that was it. Purely the good training esprit de corps, which is sadly lacking these days but, yep, yep.

And were there any times that either you or your mates considered that it may have been a bit futile?

No not really, bearing in mind you are all professional soldiers, there is no National

34:00 Service in it. Not knocking National Service because they all did an outstanding job. But no, I think everybody just loved doing the job they were trained for. And in 1966, '67, there wasn't a degree of futility about it, in fact 1969, '70 there wasn't either.

34:30 **And when you came home, what was the reception like in Australia to returning Vietnam ...?**

Not a problem. Not a problem. We came back, see, we came back as a unit, and in my case dribs and drabs. We were coming, we went back into Swanbourne, we were back with people we knew all the time. When we went out of the

35:00 regiment at any one time nobody wore a uniform we always wore civvies, the nature of the unit. And there didn't appear too much anti - we didn't particularly [feel] anti-war vibes at all. I came home on leave and subsequently met my wife but, no, I wasn't really aware of it, I know it was around but it didn't affect us, or it didn't affect me.

35:30 Mind you, I have got a hide like a rhinoceros, if anybody said anything to me I would just ignore them anyway. No. I don't know, I can't remember the fact of being in any demonstrations in Perth, there probably were, but I can't.

And I think demonstrations might have happened a bit later

36:00 **in full force, a bit later anyway?**

Yeah, they might have been, they certainly were when I was away the second time anyway.

So what happened to you after you returned from that first tour?

I came back and went on leave, met my now wife, we married, came back to, well back in Perth.

How did you meet?

At a dance in Adelaide, Norwood Town Hall.

36:30 Why the hell I was at a dance in Norwood Town Hall I can't remember, but I was. We met there and subsequently married. When I went back over to the west I was going back to take a troop back in 2 Squadron. 1 Squadron relieved us, and 2 Squadron were relieving them, and I was going back as, to take a troop back to 2 Squadron. And this is where it gets very, and when we went to do our

37:00 embarkation medicals, they had just brought in a new medical system, and I went to do my hearing and I got downgraded from FE [forward everywhere] everywhere to HO, in other words, couldn't leave Australia. To put it mildly I was again a bit upset. Any rate, that was it, so in lieu I put on

37:30 a big party at my place for the, my troops that were going away without me and that was very successful. Any rate, they send me to the Commonwealth Acoustics Laboratory to get my ears tested. He then asked me why I was there, and I said, "Because the army said I am deaf." The comment was, "If you listen to doctors you probably are but to all intents and purposes you are not," but that was the system.

38:00 So, I then had to leave the unit because you can't be there unless you're forward everywhere. However the CO [Commanding Officer] at this stage was Glen Iles, back there as a colonel, wrote to Army Office and requested that I be retained in the unit and they agreed. So I stayed there running the Royal Regiment SIG courses and one of the selection courses which is the second one I

38:30 helped with, and I stood that for about a year and seen the squadron train to go away and - not for me. I loved the regiment, but I didn't want to stay around watching everybody else go away so I applied for a transfer and got sent as a squadron sar [sergeant] major of a squadron of the Signal Squadron, my first unit with a Signals Squadron, at Watsonia.

39:00 Only thing was, it was a CMF squadron that didn't have any soldiers. I was a senior CSM warrant officer, Class 2, of the squadron with nobody in it but I didn't have a job. Anyhow, I went to have another medical while I was there about my hearing and then this time I rose up to it. And what I had done, the army had what they called the pulling system, physical evaluation, so forth, so forth.

39:30 As a certain trade or certain job you had an employment classification number. Say it was 278, the parameters for your medical is VFE with certain parameters. If you changed your employment code to a different employment, say a systems administrator, which is a senior NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] warrant office which you can do. They didn't have such stringent qualifications,

- 40:00 parameters, to become FE. So I changed my employment code to systems admin and went down to the medical and every time I was in the hearing chamber, I just sat there and went 1, 2, 3 - 1, 2, 3 and hoped like hell I was doing the right thing and finished up on the new - on the old employment code I was HO not to be exposed to loud noises, under the new employment code
- 40:30 I became FE again with the same hearing but could be exposed to - that's how stupid it was. So I immediately volunteered for the training team and got accepted, did the training in the Advisors' Course and went back to Vietnam. Nobody ever said the army is perfect I tell you.

Where was or where is Watsonia?

Victoria. You know where Greensborough, Heidelberg, out past Heidelberg.

Tape 7

- 00:33 **Could I just go back to Vietnam on your first tour, you made mention of Long Tan, and that was quite a significant battle in the history of Australia's involvement in Vietnam, how long had you been in Vietnam when the battle occurred?**

Oh God, I can't remember. About four months I think. Yeah, about four months.

And what was the squadron's role in ...?

Reconnaissance, still the

- 01:00 same right through, yeah. We had been, no we hadn't been in that particular area just before. We had reported back some significant movement north of Long Tan, but I don't think there was any time for that to be followed up. But no, that was just one of those things. The company walked into a big ambush easy as that.

And you went in

- 01:30 **after the battle?**

Yeah, we went in to follow up the Vietnamese, the VC trail to see where they went. You could see the blood trail, where they carried their people away. I don't know how - there was a lot of stories of how many people they lost there, but they lost a lot.

How many troops were in there combined with VC and NVA?

I can't remember to tell you the truth. NVA, there weren't any NVA, they were all VC.

- 02:00 Sorry, there may have been a few NVA in there to bulk the units, but they were both Viet Cong units. What they called main force Viet Cong. Yeah. I can't remember the details of Long Tan.

The Australian troops came off quite well. How did that change the morale?

I don't think it made any difference quite frankly.

- 02:30 We didn't look at it like the rest of them, Task Force. Um, don't quote me out of here please. It should never have happened. You don't have companies walking into ambushes, and that's what they did. I mean a rifle company of a battalion walked into an ambush, they handled it very, very well, but they should never have got themselves into the situation in the first place.

- 03:00 That is a, only a professional soldier's point of view. But they did very well, very commendable. You probably never heard that point of view before.

Well now I am led to ask, how did that situation occur?

I don't know I wasn't on the ground when they did it. People who were actually there could tell you. All I could tell you is the aftermath, the following up on it. But actually what they actually did, the rest of it is all hearsay, so unless you were

- 03:30 actually there you wouldn't know. My experience is that these things happen and you can ask three different people what happened and you will get three different answers, everybody looks at it in a different perspective, what their memory is of it. But that's a personal point of view I might add.

And when - just briefly before we leave the patrols in the first tour, I am curious to know how you actually

- 04:00 **unwound after?**

It didn't worry me. I didn't. I just came back and went through my normal routine. I have never had a problem with anything I have done. I just go from one thing to another and just start something else. I got out of the army, I got head hunted out of the army, and went to another job.

How did the rest of the men in the squadron unwind?

I don't know. I really don't know.

04:30 I don't think any of them had any real problems. Some of them do now, a lot of them have got real problems. But no, I - they all seemed to handle it at that stage and bearing in mind we came back and most of us went on leave so you didn't, we didn't see other for another month or so. But as far as I know, the people that I associated with, they could actually handle it, don't seem to have any problems.

05:00 As I said, you are talking about a unit of regular army soldiers coming back as a unit, it's just part of the job whereas the national servicemen they put over, they came back and virtually discharged and never seen any of the blokes they worked with after, must have been a bit traumatic for a lot of them. I don't think it affected most of us at the time,

05:30 I think some of them have been since.

And did you have leave in that first tour?

No. During the tour, no.

So we have forwarded now to Watsonia, and you were saying that you were doing training to be a trainer and an advisor ...?

No, no. Before you go to any training teams, WADDTV,

06:00 they actually run an advisors' course at Canungra at the old jungle training centre, and I went and did a course up there before I went away and then you just wait for your posting. That's a four week course or six weeks course, I can't remember, four weeks. Bearing in mind you are all senior NCOs, warrant officers or

06:30 officers on it, any rate, it's only a matter of learning some working with the Arvon and Americans and so forth and most of us on the course had already been to Vietnam anyway. That's not right, about half had been.

What was the crux of the course, what was the main objective?

Well just to advise you on the way the Vietnamese worked, the Americans worked.

07:00 Co-ordination and bringing in American air power, American air strikes, or working with American artillery or Vietnamese artillery and then we did a colloquial Vietnamese course, I can't remember how long that was, where you learned to speak enough Vietnamese to get by. I think the whole thing was,

07:30 must have been almost two months I think.

It sounds quite intense for a short period of time?

It was, but it was very, very social. It was held in the Sergeants' Mess and we all enjoyed ourselves. No, it was good, good fun.

And having spent time in Vietnam previous to that, did you find that the course was quite accurate on what they were advising you?

Um, yeah, reasonably, but the thing is

08:00 I will get back to what I was talking about before. When you are working from the task force, you are very insular from the rest of the community, the Vietnamese community unless you go down for R&C for a couple of days to Vung Tau. You would probably go to a bar or, you don't really have anything to do with the Vietnamese unless you are trying to shoot them or something. The training team is completely different because you are actually living and working with them and that was the different.

08:30 But as I said before, most of the blokes that went to Vietnam with the task force, you ask them about the Vietnamese, they really don't have that much to do with them.

And you waited then for your second posting to Vietnam, what did you do while you were waiting?

Walking around with the regimental sergeant major who was 6 SIG Regiment. I was over in the mess having a cup of tea at

09:00 10 o'clock, watching something. Just helping around the place, I didn't really have a job. I was only a couple of months while I was waiting anyway, to go away. Sorry, I took the opportunity to resettle my wife back in Adelaide, that took a couple of weeks bringing her back home. We had a young daughter at that stage, she moved back here with her, stayed with her parents while I was away but didn't want to stay in Melbourne by herself, not where we were anyway.

So when you did get your posting, how did your wife react?

I can't really remember, she knew what I did before she, before we were married. Her brother-in-law

was in the British Army, her father was in the British Army in India, she just accepted it I think, I didn't really ask her.

10:00 She obviously wasn't overly enthused about me going away, but recognised it was the job, yeah.

By this time it's around 1969, is that right?

August 1969, yeah.

So some of the opposition to the war is starting to mount with the general public, do you get a sense of public opinion?

No, I didn't personally, no.

10:30 It was certainly. I think there was a big demonstration down by Albert Park at one stage where they burned a - no it was Margaret who told me about that, burnt the tails of the police horses and things like that. Most areas I went, people were pretty supportive as far as I can remember. I can't personally think of a bad situation I ever found myself in about

11:00 Vietnam on a personal basis. I know a lot of people did. But no, I never had a problem with it. But then I never associated with those people that were anti, so that's probably one of the reasons.

Were you watching the media and seeing how they were reporting what was going on in Vietnam?

Oh, they weren't really

11:30 anti at that stage, if I remember rightly. They started to become the other way with the moratoriums I think, halfway through that tour, sorry, early, mid October, mid '70, sorry. Of course I was away at that stage but even when I came back, I didn't have a problem with any of it.

And did you think the reporting

12:00 **that you did see was accurate?**

No. Hardly any of it was. Most of it was based on sentiment rather than facts. I mean some of the actual shots that occurred and different things. The famous one of the little girl who had been hit by napalm running down the road, all that sort of stuff was right. But a lot of the stuff that was reported as happening was really a big beat up.

12:30 If you had actually been there, a lot of it wasn't - when I was at Pleiku we had a big operation, we lost one bloke and everybody was wounded except me actually. The Australian media made a big beat about Australian mercenary troops bashing their way through the jungle. I, man on the spot, the man on the spot, and I won't tell you his

13:00 name, is probably supposedly the most respected war correspondent, Australian war correspondent, in Vietnam. He was nowhere near there, he did it all from Saigon, and so were some of his other things I happen to know. And that was indicative of the whole thing. And they would just report what they thought people wanted to hear, I am sure of it. Things haven't change much now either. Obviously there is an element of truth in

13:30 a lot of it but that's from my point of view anyway.

You said earlier there were a lot of myths from Vietnam, do you think some of these myths are starting to emerge now?

I think they are, yeah. One of the things for instance is the fact that the North Vietnamese and the Vietnamese were outnumbered and outgunned. When I was up in Pleiku up there,

14:00 we were outgunned and outnumbered all the time. We would have companies operating against North Vietnamese regiments. We were taking artillery fire from across the border when we didn't have any artillery support at all. You never heard any of this stuff, it was all the fact that the big guns were on the side of the South Vietnamese, the other side that didn't apply. In actual fact it was the other way around, not in every area, it depended on where you were.

14:30 Up 2 Corps, which was a lot closer to North Vietnam so their supply route was a lot shorter, they were pretty well supplied and equipped, they had more people certainly in the Central Highlands they did. Was that the question you asked me, I forgot?

No that's fine. We'll

15:00 **just go in to your posting now - the second time back at Vietnam. What was the journey the second time?**

I flew Australia to Saigon, if I remember rightly. I got up there straight across to the Americans' store where they fitted us out with American equipment, M16 45 automatic,

- 15:30 all American uniforms, we had all our own stuff. I then went from there across to our HQ training team, got my orders and confirmed that I was actually seconded to or posted to the special forces. I then up to Na Trang with, was the 5th Special Forces
- 16:00 headquarters in Vietnam, and did a familiarisation stint with them for only 10 days. I had been up there before on the previous thing, we went up there to help them run their recondo course [reconnaissance/commando course], but that was just a side show. Did the 10 days there and I flew from there by Air America and chopper to Pleiku.

What did your familiarisation consist

- 16:30 **of?**

Just – it was actually acclimatisation. When I went up there the rest of all Na Trang were Americans and they had just come in country and never been in country before. So it was just acclimatisation, getting to know what the place was like, the climate, orientation, I just went through it as a matter of – the best part of it was actually we did a bit of the American

- 17:00 med [medical] aid, a few things that we never covered. I found that handy. Don't ask me what they were, but I remember at the time I thought we should do this in our system. I recommended when we got back that they did, but I don't know whether SAS did or not. So from there up to Pleiku.

Your role in Vietnam was quite different now?

Well the training

- 17:30 team is called the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam because, 1962, that was it's job. It was there as a training group. In early 1964, it really got changed and it became Advisors to Army Republic Vietnam, Regiments and Battalions. The only different in that was that those few of us that went to MAT strike force, which was predominantly or 2nd Mike Force, was at Pleiku.
- 18:00 1 Mike Force which has been disbanded was at Da Trang, sorry, Da Nang, and that composed of what they called Cambodians and Nungs. Nungs were ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. 2nd Mobile Strike Force at Pleiku was all Montagnards.

Do you know anything about the Montagnards?

I know a bit but I am hoping you can tell me more.

They are very

- 18:30 interesting people, there's about 13, at least, different tribes. The main ones we had, we had two main tribes in our, in my company, they were Rhade and Jarai and we had three others I can't remember, I can't remember their names. The only two that spoke a language similar were Rhade and Jarai and the rest all had their own
- 19:00 language. None of them, a lot of them could speak Vietnamese but they wouldn't on principle. No love lost between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards. They are basically, ethnically of Malay stock. They look like Malays, most of them. In fact they even have a couple of words, 'kampong' for instance, they use kampong, which is
- 19:30 Malay/Indonesian, for their long houses, and they are nomadic to a degree, not on the move all the time, they set up villages, but if something happens to them they'll move. They are spiritless, so if something, a spirit or a tree, is taking a slant, they'll up the village and go. We used to go out and actually recruit them in the villages,
- 20:00 bring them back in, dress them, educate them as much as possible, to a degree, in the time frame. Train them, and you are taking somebody who normally goes round in their normal habitat in a loin cloth, and uses the crossbow as a weapon, and taking him out and putting him in a uniform and teaching him things, firing a modern weapon. To see a
- 20:30 before and after is quite remarkable, you wouldn't think it was the same people.

What was your recruiting technique?

We just went around and showed them a fist full of dollars and, "Who wants to join Mike Force?" That was basically it. We'd have a Montagnard with us, one that had been in it for a while. No, we went around recruiting the young blokes, there was never any lack of volunteers.

- 21:00 Although there were Montagnards with the North Vietnamese, they were a minority and most of the Montagnards just didn't like the Vietnamese period because the Vietnamese had treated them very badly. The Vietnamese considered the Montagnards an inferior race, they weren't citizens of Vietnam. That's why they weren't inducted in, drafted into the South Vietnamese
- 21:30 Army. And the special forces, CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], had seen them as a method of making them a mercenary force, I don't know whether – they were a mercenary force. The other reason is that they had set up their own armed forces called FULRO, which stands for United Front for the Liberation

of Oppressed Races [Front Unifie De Lutte Des Races Opprimees], French anyhow, and they seen that as a

22:00 method of training their young people for their own armed forces to combat the Vietnamese so it wasn't hard to recruit them, what was hard was determining how old they were. You can never tell whether they were 13, 14, 18 or 19. Very hard. We always had to, they had no records, they had to take the assumption that if he looked like he was too young, we just wouldn't take him.

22:30 He had to look and have a mature body before he would be accepted, not like some of the people in our group these days. It's a problem when you don't know how old they are and they don't have records and they don't know themselves, they were born in the year of the ox or whatever it is, you know. And they were recruited, they were brought back, they were recruited, our training company with 2nd Battalion was actually run by Australians.

23:00 2nd Company, 223 Company, was Australian run, the other companies were American run. Company commander 4 Platoon commanders were Australian, the other companies were commanded by Americans with American platoon commanders. I went in there as a platoon commander with

23:30 223 Company and done about three operations with that, the OC company commander was a bloke called Dave Paul, Australian Army captain. He got posted and I took over his company command. But they were very good. It was probably the most satisfying time I ever had in the army. Bearing in mind that at stage I was a

24:00 warrant officer before I was commissioned, and you've got officers in the army that go right through from Royal Military College, right through, never ever have the opportunity to operate and control a company in operations, no matter what sort it is. Anyhow I was a warrant officer operating a company in an operation. That was great.

You mentioned before their spirituality?

Their what?

Their

24:30 **spirituality?**

They were animist, if they had a religion it would be animist. Everything had a spirit, trees, whatever.

How did their beliefs work with the philosophy of going into war and fighting?

Didn't seem to conflict with anything. They were quite happy, didn't have a problem with that, unlike the Buddhists, no.

25:00 They were very practical people. Somebody fired at them, they would fire back. I have never really gone into the philosophy of what animists believe in except that everything has a spirit.

25:30 **Were their loyalties, where were their loyalties tied to?**

Politically or militarily?

Well both politically and militarily.

I don't think - they were

26:00 certainly anti central government in Vietnam, they were anti North Vietnamese government, they were more - they had a loose federation of tribes which controlled FULRO, their loyalty was to their tribes, and they were very loyal to Mike Force until they got sold down the drain towards the end. What had happened,

26:30 they were told they would never have to serve in the South Vietnamese Army because of government, and the Americans made them deal with the Vietnamese, they would relinquish control of Mike Force and come directly under the South Vietnamese Army control. And we were going out on an operation and he wouldn't go, because everybody -

27:00 to them people had gone back on their word. So we were asked to go down and talk to them and probably one of the proudest moments of my life, I went down, we talked to them and they said, "Alright, we'll go out on operation," and that was the only Australian led company, and when I went back up to the HQ to report, I found my company was the only one that would go out. The rest of them were adamant they would never go out on operations

27:30 again. Any rate, they finally did and the carrot was that the Americans would reconsider the whole situation, and they went out on operations to Dutch Yang and I was coming home on R&R [Rest and Recreation] and they went and two days after, I was going out on R&R on the third, the proverbial hit the fan, there was a hell of a fight. We lost,

28:00 Johnny Pettit was killed, every Australian in the company was wounded or one killed and the rest wounded. I was running the Ops Centre [Operations Centre], waiting to go home. Any rate, the

commander of the training team came up, Alex Clark, who lived in Adelaide, died just recently, "How's it going?" and I explained. "What are you doing?" He knew I was going on R&R, and I said, "I am running the Operations Centre at the moment,

28:30 the American captain wasn't handling it too well," I said, "but I have made arrangements to go back out tomorrow, the chopper resupply back to the company." He said, "No you're not, you're goin' home." I said, "I want to go back out to the company." He said, "You're going home on R&R." I was very dark on him. It was only a few years ago, we were having a drink together and I said, "I have got to apologise

29:00 to you. When you told me I wasn't going back out in the field, I said I was, you weren't in my good books. I thank you for it now, you did me a good favour." That was bad news, we lost a lot of people. The company, we lost a third of them, killed in one operation, five days. Went out with 144 and came back with

29:30 about 70, no about 80.

That must have been quite distressing?

You know we are talking about Long Tan, and that was pretty - but when you consider some of the battles that were held in the northern part, up in the, 2 Corps, 1 Corps, it really was just a skirmish. I mean

30:00 the American, no - 73rd, 1st Air 7th Cavalry in the A Shau Valley in 1965. 3,500 bodies on the ground Vietnamese, lost half a regiment, Long Tan nothing compared to that, some pretty horrendous things, yeah. No, that was, then again, it was a job and I trained all my life. Look back at it now and think of the good times, again but no, I don't think I would change anything, it was an experience, a lot of people never have the opportunity or have to do.

30:30 **Where were you when you heard the news of how many were lost in the battle?**

When I came back from R&R. And that was funny, I came back here, my wife had arranged for us to have a [holiday] at one of the army holiday places, Goolwa, so we went down there, and the day before we came back I went into town and I went to Coles/Woolworths

31:00 and they had all these cheap pipes, and all the Montagnards smoked pipes but they were very expensive and very Vietnamese, all the traders, merchants, were Vietnamese, Chinese, and they used to rip them off. I seen all these cheap pipes and I said to the girl there, "Do you know how many you have got of them?" and she said, "Oh, I think there's 58, I think," and she said, "why?" and I said, "I am looking for about 100." She said, "What

31:30 for?" and I explained I want to take them back to Vietnam. So she went and got the manager, he went out the store and he came back, he had found me 108 of them, and he said, I said, "Thank you very much, how much is that?" and he said, "You can have them all at cost." I then went down to - where was it? Cowlings, no not Cowlings, the pie people, and bought four dozen meat pies. I bundled them all up, I carried four dozen meat pies from

32:00 Adelaide, on three different aircraft, back to Pleiku. We had a big pie party with the Americans. But this bloke - you know, that was 1969, so the anti-Vietnam sentiment wasn't all that lost, but this bloke, we got, early 1970s, sorry, and this bloke, "You can have them at cost," which was about a third of what they were asking for. Yeah,

32:30 so.

And what happened to those pipes?

I gave them to all the Montagnards, they thought it was great. Actually I gave them to my counterpart, I had a Montagnard 2IC who acted as the administrator and I gave them to him and he sold them for what was equivalent to 50 cents each

33:00 and the money went into the regimental fund which I controlled anyway. So they weren't giving them, the money went to, and that money was used to go to the dependants of people that had been killed. We used to have some funny things, for instance, it was CIA financed, I would have a, I had roughly 140 at any one time in the company, I would draw pay for 150. That

33:30 pay for the other 10 people would go to one side all the time and because there was no set up systems set up, that if anyone was killed in action, we give a gratia payment out of that to the family. It was the only way we could do it. And that was given, that was not under the counter, that was done deliberately. There was no way of doing it so we did it that way. We also supplied FULRO, after every

34:00 operation at least half the weapons in the company would go out over the wire out of the compound to the Montagnards, all new weapons. The Vietnamese weren't supposed to know that but I am sure they did. A lot of funny things went on.

I am just curious how with so many different dialects ...?

I had interpreters. I could make myself understood with the Rhade and Jarai

34:30 but I had an interpreter, two interpreters. When I became company commander I had myself, company 2IC was a Montagnard, I had a number one radio man, my number two radio man was in actual fact my bodyguard, watched my back all the time, and I had two interpreters and we got by pretty well. Then again, most of the stuff on operations was by sign but

35:00 they were all taught the Australian sign signals so I could go out on operations and go through a whole operation by virtually using sign language. Some of the Yanks had problems with it actually.

I was going to ask you how the Americans handled their Montagnards?

They did it, but nowhere as easily as we did because we had the fortune that we actually ran the training company, yeah.

35:30 But they were lovely people. We, a chap called Barry Peterson and I had the same interpreter, and I didn't realise until I came back and I met Barry at Canungra when I was up doing a, after I was commissioned doing admin [administration] course, and Barry mentioned the fact, "I believe you had the same interpreter." I said, "Yeah."

36:00 He said, "Well he escaped to Florida with his family, and he's making action to bring them out to Australia." Barry had bought a block of flats in Brisbane and he was going to bring him out as caretaker. "Do you want to help?" I said, "By all means." So I, my job, I went around canvassing money and getting furniture and everything and I got it all set up and the bloke decided he liked Florida better and he's still there. But it's interesting, this bloke had actually saved Barry Peterson's life.

36:30 What SAS techniques did you use to train the Montagnards with?

SAS techniques? None. That was basically operating as a normal infantry battalion. Oh, well I suppose we taught them some nicks and nacks, nothing deliberately, didn't go out to teach them SAS,

37:00 mind you, I was the only bloke there in my time that was ex-SAS, the rest of them were out of the battalions.

And being nomadic by nature, how did they handle the structure of the army?

Didn't seem to have any trouble at all. One of the things that did happen which was terrible in one respect, they had a chap, Montagnard, who had lost both legs,

37:30 he was in the camp in a wheel chair and they looked after him. Any rate, we found out one night that he had committed suicide. This is, we weren't expected to believe it, that was just the way, he put a rifle and pulled the trigger, well you can't do that without using your toes and stuff like that. He'd asked them to put him out of his misery

38:00 because what's the good of a man in his tribe which is reasonably nomadic in a wheel chair in the highlands? And I have always thought that was very tragic, hard to imagine isn't it? The only reason I could think they actually did it, I am sure he asked them to do it.

You don't know that for sure?

No, but it certainly wasn't suicide. There would be no other reason for it.

Did they have any customs that they used to

38:30 practice distinctly different from our own?

They used to, we used to, we would go on operation and we had contacts, we had a fire fight, I think we'd have big ceremonies when we came back in their village. They had this big vat of rice wine. Every time you took a sip out of it you just added more water and didn't dilute it at all. I was there, the officer in charge, and

39:00 we were given bangles and we used to walk around like gypsies with bangles on our wrists. The rest of the army used to look at us quite queerly but that was one of those traditions. They are a matriarchal society. I don't know if all the tribes are but Jarai and Rhade certainly are. I think the men think they run things, but the women certainly do.

39:30 In their own environment they are very happy-go-lucky. I can't think of anything about them I didn't like except some of their eating habits. Bamboo rats didn't really appeal to me. We came off an exercise just after Christmas and we were invited down to the village for drinks and something to eat and went down there. There's the head man with my

40:00 2IC, all the women sitting around with rats on a spit over the fire, that was going to be the evening, so I apologised, had a drink and said we had to get back, we had a religious service that night. I probably would eat it if I didn't know what I was eating, but knowing, that's a different kettle of fish. They were nice and plump, probably very tasty.

40:30 Like everything else.

How did the US forces get along with the Montagnards?

Well most of the ones that worked in my force seemed to get along pretty well. I didn't see any friction amongst them. But then again I didn't have a lot to do with the other companies because I worked in independent companies most of the time. But back in the team house they were pretty good. We got on very well, Americans and Australians,

41:00 I was talking to another bloke John Gilder, he was SAS too. We got on very well with the Yanks.

Tape 8

00:32 **Alan, before we go on, I want to hear more about mobile strike, but one thing that we didn't talk about and I think it is important to touch on because Mike Force was American run, I would just like to go back and talk about, I guess, the difference in the way the American Special Forces were**

01:00 **run compared to the Australian - from your first tour.**

That's very interesting because I think I briefly said that I went up to Na Trang for a short while, they were running what they called a recondo course, a reconnaissance/commando course. We went up there because we ran them back in Australia, somebody, somehow had said, "Would you like to send a couple of blokes up to observe?"

01:30 We went up there and I went out on a patrol with one of these blokes, a group of these blokes, and it was a, they had six men in it. And they are reasonably well trained up to a level, but the idea was, when they went out, instead of doing what we do at night, they found a big tree,

02:00 six of them, they all sat with their backs to the tree and ran a cord around it, like a signal cord, and all stayed awake at night taking no doze tablets. So the following morning when it was first light and we were ready to move off, I said, "No, we're not. If you think I am going to stay out here with you doing

02:30 this for another four days, you have got another think coming." I said, "That's dangerous," so we went back. Some of the things they did they were very good at. They were no comparison between them and our SAS. The only mob that they have that is even remotely like SAS or the Brits, is the Seals which are navy. But their special forces are far better than the rest of the army, but

03:00 they are still nowhere near as good as our mob and that is not just being parochial.

Well, can you expand on that?

No, not really. It's just so intangible, it's just things that they are just not as good doing. Their patrolling techniques are nowhere as good as our blokes. Most of them can't map read and would get lost in the middle of Rundle Mall, no that's not right,

03:30 they are nowhere near as good, we concentrate a lot on map reading, a hell of a lot, and the amount of times I have been out on operations, especially with Mike Force, and the company commander or the platoon commander of the Americans said, "Goddammit, where am I?" I would say, "Where do you think you are?" He explained and I said, "Well you got this and this and have got a map," "Nup," well I said, "Well you are not there." They had a difficulty reading the

04:00 topography on the map, we learnt it to the extent that it was a, do you know much about map reading? Well you know the grids on a map, you get that way that you can actually work with the grid and you are on that downward slope and that creek around there, you can actually pinpoint actually where you were but they'd be lucky if they were within 500 yards of where they were supposed to be. Not all of them, some of them were good, but generally speaking most of our blokes were pretty good

04:30 at it. We contemplate, and when you are on small reconnaissance groups you have got to be smack on with map reading. I can't think of any individual thing apart from that but suffice to say that having worked with both, I don't think there's much of a comparison. Their Delta Force is quite good, but that's a different, that's counter terrorist again.

05:00 **Well back with Mike Force, it was American run ...?**

Yep, yep, run out, American HQ for special forces in Vietnam was at Na Trang, Pleiku had what they called the 'B' Camp which is the next echelon, then the 'A' camp, team,

05:30 we were B team. It was Mike Force, and during the special forces they had what they call 'A' teams and this is what Mike Force was designed for. All along the border, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, they had these A teams, camps set up, they were fortified hill tops normally. We had a special forces A team which consisted of two officers and eight NCOs or

06:00 sergeants. They had in there what they called a Strike Force or strikers which consisted of - could be Vietnamese or Montagnards or whatever, depending on what area they were in. You could have, say, between 300 and 500 strikers in this camp and their idea was to patrol round there and hold that area so the North Vietnamese Army couldn't infiltrate.

- 06:30 What happened, the North Vietnamese would attack these A camps and you would have two or three North Vietnamese Army regiments attacking an A camp. When that happened, Mike Force's job was to go in and bash their way through and relieve the A camps and try and get the NVA out or hit them before they could get in.
- 07:00 Which in theory was very good but in most cases we were outnumbered and outgunned too so it didn't make – but the fact that you have got so many coming from different angles helped. The first one I went into was a place called Bu Prang, it was an A camp right on the Thai border area, the border of Vietnam coming down there, border of Laos/Vietnam coming down there and it was virtually right there. They had been attacked, they were under heavy attack and
- 07:30 it had taken a lot of artillery rounds from across the border from Laos, and the whole camp was virtually flattened, anything above deck. We choppered in, I can't remember how many kilometres out and we went in. The reason I mentioned this is because you are talking about the South Vietnamese and Montagnards running,
- 08:00 we got to within sight of the A camp and we were on the crest of a hill like the Adelaide Hills. Between us and the A camp and the air strip there was another hill line which was a bit lower. While we were there, there was a North Vietnamese unit, it was unbelievable, there was a North Vietnamese unit on one side of the hill and a South Vietnamese ranger battalion on the other side and it was
- 08:30 like watching a movie. The North Vietnamese Army came down an extended line with fixed bayonets, and charged down at the South Vietnamese, the rangers. The rangers came out of the creek line with fixed bayonets and actually had a bayonet fight in the open ground. Didn't last very long, the North Vietnamese went back to their side and the – now you wouldn't get an Australian battalion doing that,
- 09:00 I just didn't believe it. Following morning we were going to move down to the A camp, it was a bit to our right, and lo and behold, the Arvon, the ranger battalion came out, did the same thing, the North Vietnamese came out and attacked them, and people say that they wouldn't fight. The Arvon and the Montagnards were like anyone else, if they were officered well, they fought well, they were looked after, but some of their
- 09:30 officers were political appointees and they were out to get as much money as they wanted to. And I would suggest that some of these American units that had Montagnards, if they ran I would say that it was a reflection on who was running the company quite frankly, that makes sense.

And where was - were you watching this while you were

10:00 being air lifted?

No, we were moving into the A camp. The A camp was there and we were there, and the three hills there. And it was just like watching a movie, 'The Thin Red Line' or whatever it is. And to this day I don't know what happened to either unit because we moved into the A camp, relieved that all the artillery had stopped at that stage, the air strip

- 10:30 had a long line of body bags on that, I have never seen so many in all my life. But most of them had been killed by small arms fire, by rifle fire and that. The amount of artillery on this A camp completely flattened everything on top, all you could see was the trenches, and no one person had been killed by artillery fire. So the moral to the story is if you are ever anywhere and you are under artillery fire go underground and you are pretty safe.

- 11:00 Not one person was killed by artillery fire, all by small arms fire.

Who were in those body bags?

They would have all been strikers. I think there was three of them, two Americans were killed and one wounded. I think they were a mixture of Cambodians and Yards in there.

- 11:30 I can't really remember, to tell you the truth, who the garrison of the camp was. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, wherever possible, always took their bodies away with them, they were very good for that. I think the main reason was so you didn't know how many casualties they had, I don't think it was for a humanitarian reason, just intelligence sort of thing. Yeah so that was my first

- 12:00 operation with Mike Force, it was an eye opener I tell you.

What did you do when you moved into the camp?

We just secured the camp and sent patrols out the other side to make sure the North Vietnamese had actually left the area. Nothing else you could do at that stage.

And what was involved in securing the camp?

Well, in this case the North Vietnamese had started to move away so we didn't actually come into contact with them. At that stage

- 12:30 we had minor contacts beforehand, in fact each time we moved forward we had a contact and we'd

clear it and we'd go to another contact, it was just repetition until we got to A camp. We didn't have any major conflict, they had all started to move away. But ordinarily if they had still been attacking, we would have communicated with the A camp and worked out the best way of trying to relieve the pressure on the

13:00 camp. Probably, the camp's there and the Vietnamese attacking there and we'd probably come in the side or something like that, depends on the scenario. But I think I said before one of the big weaknesses of the Vietnamese NVA and Viet Cong, especially NVA, is their lack of communications they only had radios say from the battalion commander back up at HQ, so every time they developed an attack,

13:30 they had to develop it on the ground, train them, and that's the way their attack went in. And it went in the same way, the same method every time because that's how they trained their soldiers. They couldn't deviate because there was no way of telling someone to do something different. Once they were committed, they were committed and it was a big weakness for them. They lost a lot of people doing it that way. They were very dedicated, I'll give them that.

14:00 **Why were you surprised to see what you saw when you arrived at that camp?**

In what respect?

The NVA, the long line of NVA with bayonets drawn?

I was like everybody else, I had heard about the fact that you hear these stories about the Vietnamese, won't fight, always back off a fight. This mob certainly

14:30 did. Mind you, the rangers were supposed to be one of the better units but even so it was quite enlightening. I have never seen anything like it and I have never seen anything like it again. But really, it was like watching a movie. Two sides. I would suspect, and I don't know, but I would suspect they were pretty sure they were short of ammunition, both sides, at the time. Otherwise one would have ripped into the other one with what few

15:00 shots, round of fires, a few shots fired as far as we know and it was fairly far into the distance and I would say their resupply were both almost out of ammo which is probably one of the reasons the NVA called their assault of the camp off. They were very close to the border, their resupply was still very tenuous. But one of the problems, as I said, they had artillery

15:30 support, we didn't have any. We didn't have air support because it was all clouded in. One of the problems of working in the highlands, you couldn't always call on air support, and air strikes because aircraft couldn't fly in the highlands because of that weather, choppers were OK but not the fighters. Yeah, that was interesting.

Well I

16:00 **imagine it would be quite unusual to see a line of NVA bayonets drawn?**

I don't know anybody else who has seen anything like it. There was myself, Johnny Vincent, Alex McCloskey, who is since dead, Ray Barnes, who is now dead. I can't think of, there was only two of us there that seen it, and the Montagnards of course, and God knows where they are.

You mentioned it was short lived?

Oh no, it didn't

16:30 last very long. I am - most actions don't. Most actions - it might seem like it goes on for hours but, when in actual fact it only goes on for a half a minute before you fall back or something. Yeah. You can only carry so much ammunition to start with, which is one of the reasons for having fully automatic weapons is not a good idea

17:00 unless you want to get out of an ambush.

Well that was your first operation, how many of the other operations were like that one?

Ben Het was similar, Ben Het they had actually, that was the only time I know they used tanks, they all got knocked out, but I only got in right at the end of that,

17:30 the rest of it was mainly trying small contacts and so forth, that was the major - and Duk Shang which I didn't get out to. Most of it was small stuff, you know, platoons striking into other platoons of NVA, you would clear the contact. One that sticks very much to mind

18:00 was I got a call that a company had been in heavy contact, been attacked actually and had to get out. The end of - and I was asked, I wasn't very far away, and I was asked if I could go in there because they had lost I think about five Montagnards, one of them being a radio operator

18:30 with a radio on his back. Now that was very important because you had to try and keep that sort of stuff out of the NVA's hands. I was asked to go in and see if I could recover the bodies. When I got there, it was on the other side of a big clearing, and we took fire, they had only just moved in at the same time, we could see them moving in. So I thought, 'No way in the world we are going across there,

- 19:00 just lose too many people.' And we carried these M72s, a light anti-tank weapon, fibreglass, you just extend them. Now why we carried them I don't know, we always carried them, it was SOPs, standard operations procedure, we carried them, we never used them. I looked at this thing and I thought, 'Yeah,' so we got one of these
- 19:30 and we, I got somebody to aim at this tree, the weapon projectile went off, and of course splinters everywhere. So we had every light anti-tank weapon in the company aimed at these trees and fired all at once and splinters went everywhere, and the North Vietnamese Army, it was like shrapnel,
- 20:00 so things we had been carrying around for months and never used actually had a purpose but not the purpose they were designed for. We went over there, the five bodies were still there, the radios were still there, they hadn't had a chance to pick it up, so it was successful. We found another use for a light anti-tank weapon anyway. Little things like that made life interesting. But there was nothing else of
- 20:30 earth shattering - most of it was routine small contacts, clearing the contacts, you'd lose some people, couple of people sometimes, you'd have a win and kill some of them. The only other thing I could think of was we were in an area, and we'd been under a fair bit of light fire, a lot of contact, small contacts, and we were being
- 21:00 resupplied by chopper and this was quite horrendous, I suppose, for want of a better word. And there were choppers, helicopters from the American 4th Division, bringing our rations and ammunition. What hadn't been told, the Americans hadn't been told that they were resupplying Montagnards
- 21:30 or indigenous people. Any rate, when they came in they started throwing the packages to the ground and the side gunner on one of these choppers was a big black bloke. And I went, one of the sections of blokes went forward to get the thing and he opened up with an M60 and knocked half the section off because nobody had told him, he thought he was being attacked because nobody had told him he wasn't
- 22:00 supplying American troops. Fortunately he didn't kill one bloke, half the section got knocked down, were all wounded and all recovered. Can't blame him because he wasn't told, he was just told they were going to resupply a unit and when he saw all these little Asians rushing towards him with their weapons, he thought he was in trouble.
- 22:30 In one way very unfortunate but in one way very, very lucky. I think the worst scenario, one bloke lost his pinky, his little finger, but the rest of them had wounds but were all fixed up. We didn't even report it, we told them, suggested next time they inform their troops what they were going to do
- 23:00 and who they are supplying. We didn't say about the five wounded, wasn't going to prove anything or help anyone. Yeah, those things, you can understand why accidents happen in war. Like Iraq, their own troops getting hit by American air fire. These things happen, it doesn't matter how much you are trained for it, you are always going to have the
- 23:30 problem somebody not doing the right thing at the time. Any rate, it worked out well in the long run, it could have been disastrous.

And how often was friendly fire a problem?

The only time it happened to me. I nearly had an aircraft land his bombs on top of me. I had a forward air controller, and we'd popped smoke, and this

- 24:00 bloke was coming down to drop his bombs and I could see him, he was over in the wrong place and I just yelled out, "Check, check, check!" and this bloke pulled him up and he didn't drop his bombs. I mean they may have missed me, missed us anyway but when you are travelling at that speed, it is all so easy to make a mistake. It is all very easy to point the finger in retrospect.
- 24:30 Still. I am here.

And , the operations with Mike Force, you mentioned you were choppered in the first time, was that the case for all the others?

Yeah, Yeah. We - no, no. There was only one time we walked out, there was nothing,

- 25:00 we were having a pretty quiet time, and we did a big patrol of the area around Pleiku, and we walked out on that, we did that for about a week and that was nothing, that was just a - the only thing I can think of out of interest, we had a warning that the NVA were moving in on a village a Montagnard village, which was about 80 miles
- 25:30 south-west of Pleiku and I was given the job - we were on the ground - of going in and clearing the village, moving all the villagers to a safe area. So we got to the village and we called the choppers and the choppers all came in and we loaded the villagers in them and an element of the
- 26:00 company, and sent them off to Pleiku one after the other. The last chopper came and I was still on the ground of course, and there were was about three villagers, four villagers, and one of them was a pregnant woman and her husband, and her mother, and her other child. My Company HQ, when they got on the aircraft, of course I, everybody on first and then I would get on - there's no room. I am

standing on the skids,

26:30 we take off and it's not really a problem, you can hang on to them, you are just sitting on the side. The next thing, this woman started giving birth, she's kicking and everybody is - and I am ducking. It was the most uncomfortable ride I have had on a helicopter in my life, I was glad to get on the ground. Don't recommend it. I will never forget that.

27:00 And the baby was a boy and it was named 'Bac-si' which is 'medic', Vietnamese for medic, I always remembered that part. What happened to it after that I have no idea, yeah. She was - I can remember that, she was very unusual, she was a Vietnamese married to a Montagnard

27:30 and I never seen it anywhere else. I assume she was married, I mean they were a family, but that was the only time I have ever seen it. She may have been an orphan and was brought up by them, I don't know. Yeah she was a - normally they didn't have a lot to do with each other, as with the Chinese and the Vietnamese in Vietnam. Yeah.

28:00 Next.

From that story, the chopper sounds like it was overloaded slightly?

It wasn't overloaded in weight, it was overloaded with room. The poor woman was lying down and that took up a fair bit of room. At that stage of the game I thought we were going to get, we didn't have another chopper, that was the last chopper, so I think there would have

28:30 been myself, one, two, three, four - nine. One round eyed and eight Vietnamese, Montagnards normally fit in a chopper easily but when she got on she just collapsed and I didn't have any room to get in there. I mean that wasn't a problem, just standing on the skids going back was just that every now and again an arm or a leg would dash out

29:00 from the cabin while she was trying to get comfortable, and I was ducking them. But no she was, she was quite good, she finished up OK. I don't know what happened to her in the long run.

What was the general kind of Vietnamese attitude towards the Australians?

I don't know I think again it would depend on the Australians and the

29:30 Vietnamese. When Mike Force finished up and went down to start the MAT 2 up, which is the 2nd mobile, I lived in a compound with a regional force company which, the company commander, incidentally, had fought with the French at Dien Bien Phu and the 2IC had fought with the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu and they were both very good friends. The fact that he was Viet Minh wasn't that he was a communist, he was a nationalist.

30:00 Any rate I was very, extremely pleased, every morning when the Vietnamese get up they have a little parade and fly their national flag. I think we'd been in there for a month and a half, and the company commander came over and asked me if I would like to fly the Australian flag in the morning with them and I had never heard of that happening before, normally they would never do it, and that was very

30:30 embarrassing because I then had to try and get an Australian flag and I couldn't get one anywhere. I formally applied to the task force through HQ AFP[Australian Federal Parliament] for an Australian flag and couldn't get one. I finished up getting one, we stole one from the Australian Statistics Support Group at Vung Tau but officially I couldn't get one because it's not on the establishment of the company you couldn't get one and I had to

31:00 apologise every morning that my flag hadn't arrived. We really do some stupid things. I suppose the silliest thing I did was say, "Yes, thank you very much." "It's nice but I haven't got a flag," he wouldn't have understood that. One thing, the Vietnamese are extremely nationalistic, doesn't matter what side they are on, they are extremely nationalistic, they believe in the country.

31:30 Even the ones that come over here, they all wear the Vietnamese flag, the old Vietnamese flag, when they die, you can't knock them for that. But I got a flag and we survived.

Well just going back to the Mike Force, how - why was it that Mike Force [was]

32:00 **being disbanded?**

Because the Americans made this deal with the Vietnamese that they would hand over complete control of Mike Force, the, what they called CIDG, Civil Irregular Defence Group, troops to the South Vietnamese Army, this was going back on a promise they made to the Montagnards. And that was when they wouldn't go out on the operation

32:30 initially, they then said they would, they'd rethink it, and they went out, and when they came back they, it was fait accompli, the Vietnamese started moving in and we moved out, easy as that. Great friends, the Americans, when they want to be.

How did you respond to this news?

I thought it

- 33:00 was very underhand quite frankly, we weren't very happy at all. Nothing we could do about it. Nothing we could do about it but it happened, I never, ever heard what the aftermath was of what happened when they were under control. It would never have worked because the Montagnards would never have worked with the Vietnamese. I would say they would just gradually just went back to the hills with their weapons.
- 33:30 Any rate, so that was folding up and we went up to, we didn't have a date at that stage, and we went up to Da Nang for Australia Day in 1970 for celebration, no sorry, Anzac Day, to find out the day before the Prime Minister
- 34:00 in Parliament, without any consultation with the training team defence or HQ, AFP said, "The Australians will have MAT teams operating in Phuoc Tuy Province by 5th May." We didn't have anyone to go in them so the few of us were going to leave Pleiku at any rate, suddenly given jobs. I can't remember who had MAT 1, I had MAT 2, so we went down there, no equipment.
- 34:30 We had two warrant officers, we were - called for volunteers from the Task Force Centre attached to the training team. We only had our personal weapons any rate so we got down there and I still had contact with, they were starting to pack up a lot of the gear in Pleiku at Mike Force. So I contacted a mate up there with the S4, the supply officer.
- 35:00 I said, "What have you got in the store I can perron." He said, "Come and take your pick." So I went up there and the store was as big as this building, this block in square, had machine guns, fridges, radios, everything you could possibly want. Help yourself. So I just went through with a shopping trolley type thing, radioed down to Saigon, said, "Send up an aircraft," they said, "What do you want, a Caribou?" I said, "No, send a C130, a Hercules."
- 35:30 This Hercules came up and we loaded about ten big kerosene fridges, 50 M60s, everything, radios, and that was how the Australian Army set up their MAT Teams. The Yanks just turn a blind eye and, "Take what you want." We really do live on a shoe string.
- 36:00 That's all very unofficial too I might add. No, everybody knows about it now, I suppose.

Well it's a long time down the track. Um, so where were you based then?

What, when we went to Pleiku? Down Phuoc Tuy, they had a compound with a

- 36:30 regional force company, they had another village out to the west, east of there, and one south. You know what an RF Company is?
- Tell us anyway.**
- Regional Force Company, they were almost like our CMF but full time, but they were only supposed to be used, same uniforms and everything as the Army Republic of Vietnam, but they were only supposed to be using their own
- 37:00 province, very much like the American National Guard. Any rate, they had three companies there, and 22 what they called 'popular choice platoons' which were little 20, or between 18 and 30, in little hamlets around the area who were issued with M2 carbines, they were really effective. So we were down there training them and went on operations with them,
- 37:30 I think the only, the two things I remember about that, apart from the training aspect with them, was that when I went on an operation called the Long Green, we dropped in there, suspected Viet Cong camp in there, and we walked straight into a big swamp. We didn't know, it doesn't
- 38:00 show up on the maps because it was all covered in by trees. We were in there for nine hours, up to there in swamp, up and over trees. You couldn't drink the water it was foul. In the end of it we were carrying blokes out. We got too far, we didn't know when it was going to end. I'll never forget this, right in front of us was a wild cucumber
- 38:30 patch, bloody big cucumber patch, and I have never seen so many cucumbers eaten in such a quick time. I love cucumbers incidentally now, but if you are ever thirsty and you see cucumbers, I mean, again, just happen to come out where this cucumber patch was. There was no other water in the area. And I had a meeting with the three company commanders
- 39:00 one day and we decided - and something came up and I hadn't realised that each of these companies had an intelligence cell attached to it, about a five-man intelligence group, and I said, "What do they do?" "Not much." "Well why don't you get them out there and do something?" Two days later we had a - they got, contacted me, they had found a tunnel complex right in the middle of Dat Do. We sent a group in to cordon the
- 39:30 area, threw a smoke grenade down one of the trap doors, the Viet Cong started coming out, we thought this was great, the best coup we had in the area for ages. Any rate, the last person to come out was a woman and as she came out she was up to her waist and somebody said, "Grenade!" and she had a

grenade in her hand, and she just dropped it down in front of her. Any rate, it went off

- 40:00 and they dragged her out, she lost an eye, part of her hand, pretty well lacerated all round, she was in a bad way. I said to my team medic, I said, "Look, do what you can do to stabilise her," he just stood there frozen, this is an Australian, a young corporal from the task force. Any rate, the Vietnamese, this 'bac-si', he was a medic, quick as a flash he was in there, put tourniquets on,
- 40:30 I called for a chopper to come in, which I shouldn't have really done, considering who she was. Anyway, the chopper came in, we sent her down to the hospital at Vung Tau, to the hospital. That afternoon I got a big rocket from the American major in charge of the district for bringing in the chopper for this Viet Cong. A day later I was asked to come around. An apology and
- 41:00 a letter of commendation. It turned out this bird, this woman, was the deputy commander of the Viet Cong for the Phuoc Tuy Province so instead of being nasty I was the hero. Again, I never worked out what happened to her either, I don't even know whether she is alive. That worked well, but that corporal, I got back to the team house and I said, "Pack your bags I am sending you back to the task force."

Tape 9

- 00:31 **Just picking up on that incident, what happened to that corporal?**

I told him he was going to be sent back to the task force, which staged the others in the team except for the warrant officer my 2IC, got very upset because I was sacking him. I said, "I couldn't care a damn, he's going back and we'll get somebody else." When he actually left, I

- 01:00 sat them all down and said, "Just imagine that if had been you and you were wounded and I told him to fix you and he just froze, what would you do, what would you think then?" From that stage on they were all OK with it. But no, I couldn't afford to keep him around, next time he may have done what he is supposed to do but you can't take the risk. I would hate to be wounded and somebody just looked at me like a stunned mullet, afraid what they are

- 01:30 supposed to do. So he went back and I got another one, easy as that.

And the Viet Cong were quite notorious for their underground networks, did you come across that quite often?

No, only once personally. And that was this time in Dat Do. I didn't actually go down into it. I gather it was pretty extensive. But it was interesting, it was right in the middle of the village which was supposed to be reasonably friendly,

- 02:00 but then again, most of them are supposed to be reasonably friendly until they went the other way. No, that was the only one that I contacted. The first two we contacted them in caves in the mountains, but that was only once too. Undoubtedly I was in an area where they were but we never found them.

Just going back, to digress back to your SAS

- 02:30 **tour, the - when you were out doing reconnaissance patrols, what signs would you look for tunnel networks or the openings for tunnels?**

Almost anything that would give you a hint that it was there. A lot of their tunnels, I believe, and again I haven't actually - started under

- 03:00 hamlets and that, so they could put them under beds and under mats and that sort of stuff. Some of them made escape traps out in the jungle and that but I never personally never came into contact - I know the task force certainly did, they found tunnels but I never did.

Moving back to the Mobile Advisory Training Team, MAT 2, could you explain to me what their role was?

- 03:30 Well twofold I suppose, one was to advise the company commander and the officers on operations, we actually went out with them on all their operations, and to physically train them, if there was anything they were deficient on or needed further training, was to advise them on the training capability. Sometimes we trained them ourselves, sometimes we trained the
- 04:00 NCOs so they'd train them. But that's the way we normally did it but it worked quite well. The company commander, the company I lived with, he was very responsible, lovely chap, his wife was, young family, he wasn't a young man by any stretch of the imagination. As I said, he fought in Dien Bien Phu with the French and that was in what? 1954,
- 04:30 going back a bit.

What training did you - or what areas did you notice or flag that needed further training?

Basically just minor infantry tactics, patrol techniques. They would tend to go out on patrol and be all bunched up and so forth so one round would probably hit about three people. Just generally tidying up the fact that they would be using

05:00 proper patrol techniques, right grouping, they'd have – an ambush, we'd go out on an ambush and make sure they set an ambush up properly because their idea of an ambush in some cases was to go out and plop on the ground and wait for somebody to come along. I mean, half the time you could see them before you even got there. But that type of thing. A bit of demolitions, but not much.

05:30 Once I found out about this intelligence group, we worked on that a fair bit to get the intelligence going. That was very successful, I was very happy with that.

And what did you do with the intelligence group?

We fed that back in Task Force, sorry, back into the district. One of the reasons I must admit I forgot to mention, when I got the rocket from the big advisor, the senior American advisor,

06:00 about this Vietnamese, this tunnel business, it wasn't just because I called in a chopper to bring her out, and that turned out to be right, it was the fact that I did – undercut the operation without any reference that was in my area, to who the district HQ [was]. I didn't let anyone know what was going on. I did it deliberately, because nearly everything that

06:30 went through you didn't know who was going to find out about. So we just did without letting everybody know, so it wasn't compromised. I think they were a little bit embarrassed, they were more than a little upset that I did it because I think the proof was in the pudding, that if I had told them I was going to do it, an ordinance search in a tunnel, you could bet there wouldn't be a Vietnamese in the tunnel. The fact that we didn't tell them, we caught them.

07:00 **Where were these leaks coming from?**

Could be anywhere. I mean you never know, and who was who. You used to work on a principle that in any Vietnamese unit at least 5% in any one unit there was Viet Cong, or Viet Cong sympathisers, and bearing in mind they didn't have to necessarily sympathise with them. A lot of them gave information because they were coerced, the families were threatened, they were threatened.

07:30 You really couldn't blame them in a lot of cases. But you could bet that anything that you would put through the normal channels would get back to the other side. This particular time it didn't because we didn't tell anyone. I was told, however, that it would be advisable if I didn't do it again. I was going home at that stage so it didn't really worry me.

So what other work did you do with the intelligence arm?

Just generally got them out working.

08:00 We did a lot of little things. We had one case, the Viet Cong was sitting, in fact this could have been very serious, the task force, the battalion that was stationed at a place called The Horse Shoe. Little hill up the road, the company there from the battalion used to come down through our

08:30 compound at night, stayed there until almost light and then they would move out, then they would move out into an area for an ambush. I got into a bit of trouble because I, when they were doing it they weren't doing it right. They were wandering down the road, close together, they were taught not to and I said to the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of the battalion, "Listen sport, I am trying to teach the Vietnamese one thing and here's your

09:00 blokes coming and doing exactly what I am telling them not to do." Next minute I had the battalion commander down telling me, "Don't tell me how to run my battalion". Which backfired on him, because their internal mob had found, got information and we went out just before these patrols, these ambush patrols, they went out the same route every night which is again something you are taught not to do. Find an ambush position already set up with a home-made

09:30 Claymore made out of moulded together TNT [TriNitro Toluene] and PE [Plastic Explosive] with bolts and nuts in it set up with a detonator ready to ambush this Australian patrol and we discovered it before they got there. So we gently brought the battalion commander down to have a look at what he was about to walk into. He went white, they called the ambush off and went back. The following day Ron Gray, who happened to be the battalion commander who had a go at me for telling his battalion what to do,

10:00 came down and apologised in front of everybody, and then rocket! blew hell out of his operations major for letting it get to that stage. But he wasn't there, he didn't know what they were doing, they were just going out doing their own thing. So that could have been quite messy. But that was directly through what this intel [intelligence] group had picked up.

10:30 I can't really think of anything major that they did, but they certainly started to get around and try and find things out, which previously they didn't do anything.

I expect it would have been a very frustrating time to try and co-ordinate these troops?

What, for them?

For yourself as well.

Oh yeah. Um, no, not really, I mean I enjoyed

11:00 it, it was good fun and they really got into the scheme of things themselves. Once they were given the boot up the rear end, a bit of impetus to get and do things, you could actually see their whole attitude change, the fact that somebody thought they could do something, and they went out and did it or tried to do it. I was quite pleased because it worked quite well. And the company commander thought it was

11:30 great because his company had had a major achievement and the first thing that happened in the place for a fair while. Yeah. It was great.

What did you enjoy the most about that job?

Which job?

The working with MAT 2.

I think it was all – nothing that I could pinpoint that was the best aspect of it. It was quite good.

12:00 I think, as I said before, probably the most satisfying part in my whole career was running the company on operations out of Pleiku. That was the ultimate. No, it was good down there, I mean, again, I was my own boss, you know I had myself, one officer and four corporals and three RF companies and so forth. So that was satisfying. At that stage

12:30 I was glad to get home after that.

How long were you with MAT 2?

I can't remember, I think it must have been about five or six months I suppose. Think it was, August – hang on, May, I was home in October, would have been home in August except they had the big parade for Westmoreland to give the training team the citation,

13:30 and instead of coming in August I stayed for the big parade and then came home.

You mentioned earlier about the Dat Doo Dogs?

Dat Do.

Dat Do, sorry.

It was a standard joke, I mean in the old days in the task force in 1966/'67, the whole idea was, the standard joke is, "What are you going to do tonight?" I mean nothing, you couldn't do anything, you either went to the boozier or sit and

14:00 play cards or whatever. And somebody said, "Let's go to the Dat Do Dogs." It was a standard joke and when I took over this MAT team up in Dat Do, I sent a circular up to a few people I knew, the fact that the squadron was up in, the SAS squadron and a few other people I knew, inviting them down to the Dat Do Dogs that were to be held. Any rate we had them on a Saturday, during the day, the dogs are

14:30 supposed to be at night. And I, we actually taken in a pet, a little puppy, so we got down there to the Dat Do Dogs and got stuck into the grog. Had an afternoon to remember, but that was the Dat Do Dogs. But we had set one up and that was it. Yeah.

15:00 Like saying you are going to the Melbourne [Cup] and not going, that's all it is.

How often did the Dat Do Dogs ...?

Only the once, just as a spur, yeah, was only a one only. If I could have thought up a way of making up dog races I probably could have done it. That's with the dogs that weren't already in the pot.

What other, I don't want to sound corny calling them morale building exercises, but what other things did you do to try and keep spirits high?

15:30 Amongst my people or the Vietnamese?

Well I expect there it would have been different for both.

Quite considerably. The Vietnamese wherever possible was to, I used to try and con as much gear to make their life, bearing in mind they had their families in the compound too and they lived in holes in the ground virtually, in bunkers, the families, I used to try and get as much stuff as I could, con out of

16:00 **the Americans, the task force, to make their life a little bit better, a little bit more pleasant. I think they appreciated it. We had volleyball competitions against the Vietnamese, you know they seemed to, I don't think anyone got despondent. Well pretty happy actually. But not a hell of a lot you could do. You were**

16:30 **either stuck in the compound or out patrolling.**

And what did you do for your men?

Well we had a team that would have almost make like Home and Country. We had two big kero [kerosene] fridges that we had conned, all this stuff, we had tables made up, we had all these little cookers made up and

17:00 we had things like culinary, every day when there wasn't an operation on, somebody was given the job of coming up with a different type of dish. Some of the things you ate were absolutely revolting, and some of them were good too. But no, we used - plus the competition between our blokes and the Vietnamese. One of the things the

17:30 Vietnamese appreciated, they didn't have any fresh water, they had to go a fair way to get water, I managed to get hold of a tanker, a tank, and bring it in and set it up. Had the truck for the task force every now and again come in and fill it up with water and that was a great boon for them. But no, we set up a canteen which was for use by the team and Vietnamese. No it was,

18:00 and as I said, the piece de resistance was the, when they asked if we would like to fly our flag. When I finally got the flag we'd have both flags go up, I had my group on one side and the Vietnamese on the other side. I got a couple of good shots at that I was, yeah, it was something to see both flags flying together but to be actually asked to fly the flag was quite a complement I thought, I was very pleased

18:30 and surprised. But what you could [do] for [people] in that sort of environment was just to make sure everybody's spirits - everybody gets a fair share of the work. No, it worked alright. It did for me anyhow, I don't know how it was for everybody else.

19:00 We had the added advantage I suppose, we had two MAT teams started up a few miles away and we actually helped, advised them in setting up their teams and building their compound so the blokes were busy all the time. I mean, the worst thing is to have them just sit around moping, we didn't have any of that.

19:30 So when I went home they were all quite, seemed to be pretty happy with life, I don't know what happened after.

What was it like saying goodbye to Vietnam?

Alright I suppose, I really can't remember. I just remember packing my bags, getting on a plane at Saigon and coming home. I really can't think of anything out of the ordinary.

Saying goodbye to

20:00 **anyone?**

We had a few tearful farewells from the Vietnamese company that I was living with. The CO's wife and a lot of the NCOs' wives and families, were very, seemed very, very sad to see me go, which was nice in a way. But no, it, I was quite happy, the job had been done, I was prepared to go home and that was it. I went home and got posted - have we finished with Vietnam?

I don't know, I think so, yeah.

I got posted to, back to Adelaide, for the first time I had a home posting. They didn't have a job for me anywhere, so they

20:30 made me supernumery as the assistant command signals officer. I was there for a year and I got a phone call saying, 'Would I like to go to Singapore?' I said, "Yeah what's the job?" They said, "Staff officer 3, captain's job as Singapore HQ Anzac Force." I said, "Well," I said, "I better ask my wife." So I asked Margaret and she said, "When are we going?" I said, "I don't know, they didn't tell me that." So I rang Canberra back and they said, "Oh,

21:00 we want you to go in 10 days." We'd just moved into a new home and everything else, wife and daughter hadn't had any shots. I rang Margaret and said, "Can you do it in 10 days?" and it all went, we went to Singapore, all very hush, hush because they wanted me there urgently. Got there, went into a hotel, rang up the HQ Anzac Force. "We weren't expecting you for

21:30 three weeks." So we stayed in the hotel for three weeks until they found us a house. We stayed there for just over two years and that was very enjoyable.

Can you explain to me what the Anzac Force ...?

Australian and New Zealand United Kingdom Force, the composite force under the joint agreement with Singapore and Malaysia. Previously it was a Commonwealth brigade predominantly run by the Brits. The British Navy was in Singapore. The

22:00 Brits got out and ANZAC Australian and New Zealand composite force took over from the Brits. So we had an ANZAC Army, Navy, Air Force and UK and New Zealand, all different units.

What was your role in Singapore?

I was the SO3 Telecommunications. Sounds impressive doesn't it? I was responsible - it's the first time I had been back in a purely signals job in the army

- 22:30 after being in for so many years, and I was responsible for all the telephone communications, switchboards, PABXs [Private Automatic Branch Exchanges], everything on Singapore. Bearing in mind the Singapore Telephone Board hired all their cables off the Brits, the Brits built everything, and we took that over and I had to set up a miniature Telecom. I had a
- 23:00 sales staff, we supplied telephones to the married quarters, the houses with lines, and PABXs to the Singapore Telephone Board. A great job. I worked 11 months, six days a week from about 8 o'clock in the morning until about 11 o'clock at night and I went in one day and a Chinese girl, Maureen, who was running the accounts and so forth and
- 23:30 somebody else was running the installations of all the PABXs, and I sat at my desk and I thought, "What the hell am I going to do now, everything had just fallen into place." So I went to the chief signals officer, a bloke called Neil Condo, a colonel, an Australian colonel, and said, "I think I have worked myself out of a job." He said, "I know, I have been watching." I said, "What do you want me to do now?" He said, "Come in," and I would say that by 10 o'clock any faults that would be fixed up and he said, "The pork down in the
- 24:00 mess looks very appetising, just so I know where you are." So for the rest of the two years, I used to come in, sit around the mess for lunch, go to the pool in the afternoon, Margaret would come down, and that was it. But - it was hard work but all of a sudden it was all there so I had another 13 months of virtually socialising.

During this time were you monitoring what was happening in Vietnam?

- 24:30 Keeping a watching eye on it, yeah. Nothing happened that we didn't expect would happen. It only happened a little bit, I don't know whether I thought it happened quicker than I thought or later. I thought it would happen that way. As soon as they said the American, the Vietnamisation of the conflict, they wouldn't go, they had some very good people, the Vietnamese, but they had a lot of people on the take who were just
- 25:00 looking after themselves whereas the other side were dedicated. But at the time it all seemed worthwhile.

After Singapore, what was your posting after that?

I got posted to 7 SIG Regiment. I got there and I was sent down to Canungra to do the Administrative Technical Officers' Course where I was commissioned.

- 25:30 I went back there as the adjutant and I was posted to - back to Kisc as the officer commanding the district support unit. Then that was closed down and I became the 2IC sorry OC of the Personnel Depot - District Support Unit which looks after everything in the scope. And I was there for two years and I got posted to the Australian
- 26:00 Staff College, on the staff there as the Logistics Officer in Electronic Warfare instructor. I was two years there. We left our house vacant and decided we'd rent it out, three months after we rented it out we got posted back to Adelaide as camp commandant of Hamstead. There
- 26:30 the, I went up to Queensland as Senior Electronic Warfare Umpire on Kangaroo 81. I got a signal up there asking to ring Don Willet, who was an ex-brigadier, which I did, he said, "Are you interested in getting out of the army?" "No, not really." He said, "If you are, come and see me." I got back, he had taken over as the Director of the Liberal Party, and I got back and
- 27:00 found I have been posted to Canberra on promotion to major. I don't want to go, I kept out of Canberra every posting, I hate the place, I can't think of one redeeming thing about Canberra, Commonwealth Club is probably the only one. So any rate, so I rang Don Willet up and he said, "Come and see me," so he offered me a job.
- 27:30 So I said, "I will take it." So I went back, wrote out my resignation, and mate was the OC, Max Aitken, who had been in the SAS with me, he was commissioned, he was there as OC of the cadet brigade. He said, "How are you going?" I said, "Alright, I have accepted a job." Said, "Well if you want a job, there's another job," and he offered me the job as an administrator and I didn't want it. I said I will ring him up.
- 28:00 Told MAT to go and see him, so he got the job and both put our resignations in at the same time. So for the next 10 years I was Operations Manager, Campaign Organiser, for the Liberal Party. And no, I don't always vote Liberal, but go on.

I wasn't going to go there. I just want to go back to coming out of Vietnam.

- 28:30 **How did you feel - just trying to think of how to word this. Did you have any problems settling into civilian life?**

None at all.

So despite leaving a war zone ...?

None at all. I have had no problems similar going into anything. Going from non-commissioned to a commissioned rank didn't worry me the slightest, going from the army to civilian life, civilian

29:00 life to the army, never worried me. Just went and done it.

Did you have any nightmares?

No. No. No. I think of things, I remember things. But I only, only - every now and then I might dream about something that happened over in Vietnam or

29:30 Borneo but I just treat that as normal memories. You remember everything. The only thing - the funny thing - the only thing that jolts my mind sometimes is a car, the Kia. If I have Kia in front of me I read K-I-A 'killed in action' and invariably I will start thinking of somebody who was killed over there

30:00 but that doesn't give me nightmares, I just think of it, it's just another memory. No different to my remembering my mother washing my socks or whatever. Does that make me an insensitive barbarian?

No, I am just curious as to what other things might trigger your memory?

The first time I seen it, I didn't read it as Kia, I read it as killed in action. Funny isn't it?

30:30 No problem or anything.

How about other men who have gone through your experience as well?

I don't know, I can't really speak for other men. I know people who say they had problems. The only bloke I know personally, the chap I was talking about from the Second World War, Doug Collet. He used to wake up screaming,

31:00 thinking about his mate that went down in flames beside him in the Spitfire. But no, I know chaps that do legitimately have problems, wake up thinking about it. But no, it doesn't worry me, I just treat it as another memory, same as good memories. You always have bad memories but it doesn't haunt me if that's what you are getting at. A lot of people say they do. But no, never

31:30 worried me.

What was available to you if you were suffering from post traumatic disorder?

Oh well there were the counselling services, I don't know how effective they were, I didn't have anything to do with them.

Were they available when you first left Vietnam?

No. No. No counselling at all. We just came home and went back to our jobs.

32:00 I think it depends on your background and where you came from. If you are regular army you probably didn't have as many problem as the National Serviceman, that's understandable. But then again, I know blokes in the regular army that say - I know a couple of them that I think that put it on, but that's by the by, and I know a couple of them that are quite genuine, but

32:30 I think it depends on your attitude when you go there too. I went there with an open attitude and it didn't really worry me whatever happened. I was scared out of my tiny mind occasionally. Then again, I do that when I walk across the road occasionally with cars bearing down on me, that's the difference.

You made a comment about the National Servicemen, what do you think makes their

33:00 **experience different from your experience?**

Firstly, they went over there in my opinion partly trained, compared with us. They went over there, they did their thing. They came back and virtually discharged straight away into a civilian environment and most of them never seen the blokes again they served with, or very rarely, whereas we associated all the time.

33:30 It's got to give you a different slant on things. That was brought home to me when they had the big return parade in Sydney. I was at a buck's party with a friend of mine whose future son in law, his buck's party, and the friend had just had a heart attack

34:00 and I told his wife I would look after him, make sure he didn't get too excited with the whole thing. I didn't know, but three of the chaps there were ex-Vietnam National Service and they were all going over and they said, "Are you going to the big parade?" and I said, "No, it's all a big yawn." They really got stuck into me. They brought home to me the fact they all came back and virtually they said, "Thanks mate,

34:30 go home." With a few exceptions of a few blokes they served with. Now that's completely different to

the way we did it, and I said, "I think there should have been something better." By the same token nearly every National Serviceman volunteered to go there, they didn't have to go there. Were you aware of that? It's a fallacy that all vet [veteran] National Servicemen went to

35:00 Vietnam. Only 40% of all National Servicemen went to Vietnam and they had to go, they had to actually say they'd go, they weren't actually forced to go, that's in the records. I didn't realise that myself until recently. In fact these three chaps all said - I said, "I can understand" - they said, "Well we didn't have to go, we volunteered to go, we were given the option." I didn't realise that,

35:30 something that doesn't come out. Now whether it applies in 100% of the cases, but certainly applies in a lot of them, the ones that I have met. Has that ever come out in your interviews? No, probably never comes up.

Vietnam was one of the most political wars that the Australian public has had to digest in quite some time?

Prior to Iraq.

36:00 **What was the treatment of the vets, what was the attitude of people when they actually found out you served in Vietnam?**

I have never had any problem at all. I never ever had an adverse comment at all. People asked me what it was like and some of the things I would say and they would say, "That's not what we hear," and I would say, "Well that was actually what happened." But no, if somebody

36:30 every did I certainly can't remember, but I am pretty sure I never had anything. Mind you, a lot of people don't pick me anyhow.

What did you miss about the army when you left?

Not a hell of a lot of it. I am still pretty well involved. I started the SAS Association in South Australia. Member of the Training Association, I am still a member of the Mess at Cedick. I am a legatee, Legacy Club, I have been that for years.

37:00 I chair the fundraising executive of Legacy, Committee of Legacy, so I have still kept an involvement in it and course here I have been a member here and past President and all that stuff. I am really not divorced, I still get some of the benefits from it.

37:30 But no, I don't find, miss anything from the style of life, again it's what you make it. I went into a job which virtually for 10 years, I virtually did my own thing, planned it, started up training courses and all that sort of stuff for prospective politicians, so it wasn't really a lot different to the army.

38:00 **And what would you say having reflected over all of your experiences today, what would be your proudest moment during your army experience?**

Good God, my proudest moment. I don't think that anything in particular stands out, there would be several that I would think. I think it was successfully being bereted, badged

38:30 at SAS in the old days. I would say running, being a company commander in Vietnam with Mike Force, being commissioned I suppose. I could have been commissioned years ago if I wanted to, that's another story. And being married, that was one of the best things I did. The thing I

39:00 regret is that for years I gave, I always put my job first, and I shouldn't have done. The job came first and the family normally came second until I decided to get out and I got this job and my daughter's, we just got to Westminster and this sort of stuff, now is the time to put the family first and the army in the background.

39:30 I know a lot of people find it hard to agree but you really have got to in some cases. Your job, some people say family first but if you don't have a decent job you don't have a family, in some cases. Margaret always understood. But no, that's probably it.

And how would you like your experiences in Vietnam to be remembered?

40:00 By me or by someone else? I don't know that I want to worry about it, I remember it with more fondness than anything else. Whether I am a happy warmonger or not, I don't know. But I can't think of too much I didn't like about Vietnam, enjoy, I don't know about 'like', there were times

40:30 I wish I wasn't in the position I was in at the time, but in retrospect as an overall experience I thought it was well worthwhile and it probably made me a better person in some ways, it made me respect things that I didn't have respect for, don't ask me what they are in particular, but generally. And I don't think it did me as an individual any

41:00 harm, it certainly did a lot of people and no doubt about that.

And quickly before the tape runs out, any advice for future generations?

Yeah, don't have wars, talk yourself out of it. But unfortunately it's a fact of life. While we got - I think

peace in our time - while we have ego, avarice and people disagreeing there will always be wars,

41:30 and anyone that says we should disband with armed forces and so forth is very naïve. I wish that wasn't true but unfortunately it is. There's always somebody wants something that belongs to somebody else, fact of life. My homily for the day.

Thank you very much Alan!