

Australians at War Film Archive

Allyn McCulloch - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:46 **We'd like to start with a brief introduction to your story.**

My name is Allyn Bryce McCulloch. I was born in Adelaide, South Australia. My mother and father

01:00 were both blind people and I was brought up by my mother. My mother was divorced when I was about 5 years of age. I lived with my mother. When I was about nine my mother met another chap who was very good to her. He was a sighted gentleman. He looked after me as a young child as well. I appreciate how he did look after

01:30 me.

When did you join the army?

I enlisted in the army on the 30th April 1963.

Can you take me through briefly your army career?

When I first joined the army I went to Kapooka and did recruit training. I actually got a cup when I left recruit training for the most improved soldier. That tells you how bad I must have been when I first went there.

02:00 I'll never forget getting off the train in Wagga [Wagga] and a guy with three stripes was yelling at me. I was saying, "Who are you yelling at?" I soon found out who he was yelling at and why.

Where did you go from there?

I went from there to Ingleburn infantry centre and I did another 6 months there. Then I was posted to 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] in Holsworthy. The day I marched in to 1RAR the flags were on half mast. I thought "This is a bit

02:30 strange. Nothing special today." But it was the day that President Kennedy was assassinated.

Once you finished in Kapooka, where did you go?

That's when I went to Ingleburn. Recruit training, corps training and 1RAR.

From Ingleburn you went to

1RAR.

Where were you posted with 1RAR?

At Holsworthy barracks. At that time "sprinkler force" was still in effect, which was the ready reaction to go to Laos.

03:00 I was in C Company 1RAR and then one day they all gave us our rifles and put them in our lockers, which was unusual. Gave us rations and packed all our equipment. I thought, "Hello, this could be the real thing." That was prior to Vietnam when the units were rotating in what they called sprinkler force.

When did you go to Malaya?

I went from Holsworthy to Woodside, South Australia where they formed 4 RAR,

03:30 under Lieutenant Colonel David Thomson who later became director of infantry. We were there for some 18 months. At that time this was prior to Vietnam, 4 RAR and 1RAR we having a big battle amongst their senior officers to see who was gonna be the first unit into South Vietnam. Both units, 1RAR and 4RAR were at

04:00 full strength and operational. So we went to Malaya and 1RAR went to Vietnam a year later.

How long were you in Malaya?

I was in Malaya for 2 years. That was split up into 6 months in Malay under confrontation, which was active service. They have different degrees of verifying active service and

04:30 war service. In Malaya we did airport security, beach patrols, radio installation and patrols.

When did you get to Borneo?

Went to Borneo on Anzac Day 1966. We left from Port Dixon.

How long were you in Borneo?

In Borneo for 6 months doing operations on the Malay Indonesian border.

05:00 Malaysia.

You went back to Malaya after that?

Then we went back to Malaya and that's when I started with the tracking team because the dog handlers had returned to Australia to form the nucleus of the tracker wing at Ingleburn.

What year did you go back to Malaya?

1966.

From

05:30 **your training in Malaya, where did you go from there?**

In Malaya I was attached to the British army training unit at Kota Tinggi where I first did a visual trackers course then a dog handlers course. That was probably the most interesting part of my whole army career, working with the dogs.

How long were you training with the British army?

Off and on for about 12

06:00 months. Then we returned to our unit that did "hearts and minds" operations on the Malay Peninsula and on the east coast of Malaya. We did venture up the Thai border once.

How long were you with 4RAR?

All told it would have been 3 years, or 4 years.

When did you leave Malaya?

I left Malaya in October

06:30 1967 and returned to Australia. When I came back to Australia, being in war service, I bought a house, I was married at the time, 'cos I was due to go to Vietnam with 4 RAR in the April of 1968. However I was transferred from 4RAR to a new unit they were forming at again Woodside, South Australia, which was 9RAR.

07:00 **Where were you posted with 9 RAR?**

At Woodside. I had an AHQ [Air Headquarters] army promotion to corporal, became a searching commander in C Company 9 RAR. In 9 RAR we carried out a lot of our own in-unit training. I was attached to that as an instructor and that was the first time I had much to do with national servicemen.

When were you posted to Vietnam with 9 RAR?

I went

07:30 on the advance party of 9 RAR in November 1968.

How long were you in Vietnam this time?

I was there for 6 months. I had seen quite a bit of action and I decided to take my discharge, which was due in the April of 1969. I discharged myself and then tried working around Adelaide for a while,

08:00 but didn't work out so good. I decided to rejoin the army and was posted to 3 RAR at Woodside. So I went overseas three times from Woodside.

When did you start your second tour of Vietnam?

1971. I was platoon sergeant of tracker platoon.

How long were you in Vietnam the second time?

Would have been

08:30 very close to 6 months again. Had a bad fallout with the battalion commander and I elected my discharge.

When were you discharged this time?

June 1971.

After you left the army?

That's exciting. After the army I suppose I tried around at different jobs and

09:00 mixed I suppose with some not desirable people and got myself into a little bit of trouble with the police and got locked up in jail. Mainly due to drink. I had a lot of problems at the time. Marital problems and problems within myself after what had happened to me in Vietnam. It took me some years to find out what had actually happened.

09:30 That was a pretty bad time. I remember trying to get some psychological help. At the time there wasn't any way of getting any psychological help and I remember seeing one psychiatrist at one stage and he said, "Just go home and forget all about ever being in Vietnam." I tried to explain it to him that we are animals and once you train a dog to be a guard dog you just can't pet him and send him home and be a good boy. Then when I

10:00 tried to get help for alcoholism, which I was suffering from at the time, due to the stress and mental problem I had, I remember one psychiatrist said to me, "Well, you're gonna go to jail. Go to jail, you'll feel better when you get out." That was the attitude at that time.

You were born in Adelaide?

I was born in Adelaide.

Where was your family home when you were born?

We lived in

10:30 Prospect in Adelaide itself.

What was the home like?

My mother and father were both totally blind. When I was about 5 my father left home and my mother and I stayed together for several years on our own. Then she was lucky enough to meet a sighted guy and he was very good to my mother. He treated her very, very well after she'd gone through a bit of a bad time.

11:00 I had nothing but praise for the way he looked after both of us.

What adaptations were made to your home to accommodate for your parents' blindness?

I actually helped my mother cook and look after the house. I didn't have a lot to do with other handicapped people and I think that it most probably, even in the army, did help me a little bit

11:30 later on when promotion came along, because you found that you were able to look after people. Part of being in the army is to actually look after people, or try your best to look after people. I suppose that was a good background.

Describe what your home was like physically.

We didn't have any money, we were rather a poor family 'cos there weren't the social security benefits like there are today.

12:00 My mother was on invalid pension because of being blind. My father was a public relations officer for the institution of the blind. He was a very good speaker. I wish I was half as good as him. He was involved in minor politics and he was one of the first people to get the talking books for the blind. He had a fair bit of push in him. We did keep in contact throughout my younger years.

12:30 I had a sister and a brother, my sister's the oldest and then there's my brother. He served in the army. He was part of K Force [Korean Force] and went to Korea. He was wounded the same day that peace was declared on a battle with 2RAR called the Battle of the Hook.

Just trying to get a picture of your home in Prospect.

13:00 **How many bedrooms were there?**

Three bedrooms. My mother looked after another old blind person that actually owned the house. After several years his family wanted the house back and my mother's uncle bought us a house further up in Prospect, which my mother paid back to him out of her pension over several years. That was a little cottage

13:30 up near Highbury in Prospect. A little worker's type cottages, which only had one bedroom and a sleep out. It was comfortable and it was good to grow up there.

What adaptations did you make to your home for people that

My mother was pretty good at getting around. I can remember as a young boy trying to fool her and bring the dog inside. I've always

- 14:00 had dogs. I used to try and sneak the dog in the house. As a young boy I'd try and put my hand over his nose so he wouldn't pant. She'd say to me "Allyn, that dog's in the house." I still don't know to this day how she knew the dog was in the house, but she did. People used to comment on our house how clean it was. You find a lot of blind people, where we look at a floor and can't see dirt, they feel
- 14:30 with their feet and hands. Our house was always neat and tidy for what we did have. My mother was a very good cook. I used to help her cooking. That's when I became interested in cooking. I still cook everything in this house to this day. Because I thought she taught me well.

What dishes did she teach you?

Her favourites were pies and pasties and egg and bacon pie and stews and casseroles and

- 15:00 I always got the job of thickening because she couldn't see to thicken things. It was quite OK. I played a lot of sport as a younger person. I used to go and play school boy soccer in the morning and high school soccer in the afternoon. I played cricket with some people that went onto be very well know sports people within South Australia. Graham Farrell who played cricket for South Australia.
- 15:30 Peter Anderson that played league football. We all grew up in the same street. So we were always there kicking a football or playing cricket.

Who were your mates growing up?

I suppose Graham Farrell, him and I were very close, Peter Anderson was close. Phil Wylie, another young lad that lived around the corner. By that stage we were starting with motorbikes and old cheap cars. We found out how to fix all these

- 16:00 things up.

Were your brother and sister with you when your mother moved to the other house?

No, just my mother, myself, and my stepfather. My sister was married fairly young. She still lives here in Adelaide. She had three children. My brother was a bit of a wanderer, but he was OK, it was just his way.

Were you close to your brother?

We

- 16:30 were. Then we had many years apart and it was only in the last couple of years I've got to get to Queensland to see him on one occasion and be in contact with him. Then we started relating to service problems and all that, he'd never spoken about these things. It came out in the last couple of years.

How old were you when your brother went to Korea?

9. He had his

- 17:00 21st birthday in Korea. I had to go down the local bakery and got a cake. We stuck a bottle of brandy or rum or something in side it. By the time it got there it was broken, but they reckoned the cake was OK.

What do you recall of him signing up and going over with K Force?

Not a great deal. I just remember him coming home in uniform and I thought, "This is great." A 9 year old and his big brother is going off to fight a war.

- 17:30 I found out later it wasn't all doodle skittles. He went away to Korea and when he came home he was badly wounded through a Chinese mortar round that blew him up. That was the same night that the peace was declared, or the armistice was declared. During that 24 hours before the armistice, the Chinese actually threw everything at them even though they knew it was stopping at midnight.

What did he tell you about Korea?

Nothing in those days. Only recently him and I sat down and he showed me a diary of the last 17 days of 2RAR on the Hook. They had a fair bit of stuff thrown at them. Their incoming rounds were something like 80 an hour, which is fairly heavy artillery.

Did you ask him about his wounds and how he got them?

He never told me at the time,

- 18:30 but later on he did tell me that it was a mortar round that got him. They had been in and out of fighting patrols right up until the armistice. The amount of fire that was going on that day, the Chinese were obviously trying to push 2RAR off the Hook, but they were more interested in putting casualties on the

Americans, which was on one of their flanks.

As a 9 year old seeing your brother in

19:00 **uniform, what was your reaction when you saw him come back from Korea with horrific wounds?**

He was a different person physically. They were gonna cut his leg off or stiffen it. He was a pretty bombastic guy and he told them to stick it up their bum and he discharged himself from Royal Park Hospital and came home and went about his life without talking much about it

19:30 until the later years. I suppose we don't think about those things. The bad side. We just think of the uniform and all those things that young children think of.

What was your father like as a father?

I never had a great deal to do with him. I'd see him I suppose birthdays, Christmas and a couple of times during the year until I got older. When I was a bit older,

20:00 in my teens, I made a point of seeing him occasionally and we'd go for a bit of a walk down to the Cathedral Hotel and have a couple of beers and talk. There was no real animosity between myself to him, but there was, I think by the time I was a young teen being brought up and seeing handicapped people and living with handicapped people, it gave me a bit broader outlook

20:30 on things.

You mentioned your stepfather seemed more like a role model than your father.

He was there. I know at the time, being with my mother for several years, I think I gave him a pretty hard time. I suppose we don't realise it until these things happen to us in life. I suppose I could have made life a bit more pleasant.

How would you give him a hard time?

21:00 I was a bit of a ratbag I suppose. I had a big motorbike and I'd go out on that and come home late. Rev it up and ride through the gate and push the gate open with the motorbike. That used to P him off a bit. I can see why it did P him off. He looked after my mother and that was the best reward I could have got. I might add that my mother used to have a drink occasionally

21:30 and she always bragged to other people she had two sons and both her sons had been in the army. She rubbed that into quite a few people.

How would you describe your mother's character?

She was a fairly happy go lucky sort of woman. She gave up a lot for me. She gave up her sight for me. She had retina pigmentosa, which was diagnosed

22:00 before I was born. They said the shock of me being born would affect her eyes. I think she was given the option of termination, but she didn't. She was coming home from town on a tram in those days. I was in a pusher, 6 months old, and the lights just went out. She had to find her way home. I owe her a lot too I suppose. We were fairly close.

22:30 When she did die in 1983 it left a fairly empty spot within me. She'd always been supportive of me even though I'd been a bit of a ratbag. I always see these days that mothers usually do support their sons.

She was sighted for quite a few years and suddenly went without sight?

Yeah, she had eye problems as a youth, which did some of her

23:00 brothers through this hereditary blindness. I suppose she accepted it when it did come because it had already happened to one of her brothers. She seemed to, I was only a baby when it happened, but it didn't bother her a great deal. Later on in life there were ways of having a look at this problem, but she said she'd been

23:30 blind all her life, so she was quite happy to finish her life.

How old was she when she went blind?

She would have been in her 30s. Early 30s. She passed away when she was 71.

How did your brother and sister cope with their mother losing sight?

I don't know, because I was only a baby. As far as I know my mother was always blind. My sister was

24:00 I think 18 when she was married so I was still only very young. She's 12 years older than me. So I can't really remember that much of her being in the house. Only vaguely.

Growing up with other children it would have seemed an unusual household.

It was. I remember the first day I

24:30 went to school. My Mum cut me a sandwich and I went to school on my own. I had become independent I suppose because of the way the family structure was. I'm watching all these other children crying 'cos their mums were dropping them off for school. I thought, "They're mother pusses aren't they?" My mother could never come to school to see me because we never had any friends in those days that had cars. This is

25:00 early 1950s, late 1940s. Late 1940s. When there was ever parents' days I never had any parents there. So it made me a little bit hard I suppose. Things like hole within myself.

Did you ever think you were missing out on anything?

No, I don't think so. My mother gave me a lot of affection and I think she spoilt me with what she could afford.

25:30 I always got something for Christmas, always got something for my birthday. I think she did the best she could do. I think that's the main thing. If you can only ever do the best you can do, that's all that's needed.

There's a slight role reversal where the child is looking after the parent. How were you in the role of looking out for your mother?

It works pretty quick that when you help

26:00 an unsighted person you don't grab hold of them, they grab hold of you. You come to a step and say, "Down a step." It just seemed to be normal to me. A lot of her friends, she worked at the blind institute, which was in North Adelaide at the time. That's where she met my father. I suppose I was always around people that were handicapped in one way or another,

26:30 because there were deaf people there in the Royal Institution for Blind. Some of them were a little bit mental, slow I suppose, because of their afflictions. I think it really helped me look at things in life. I think in some ways I got more than other people.

Where did you go to school?

27:00 I didn't like school. I went to Blair Athol Primary School. Then we shifted from one part of Prospect to the other and I then went to Nailsworth Primary School. I wasn't a very good student. My brother was an excellent student. He had the brains and I didn't get the brains. So I left school when I was,

27:30 I never went to high school at all. I failed one year in primary school and I sort of completed grade 7 and I wanted to leave school because I couldn't see anything there for me. Academically I couldn't seem to handle it. I left school and got a job through a cousin of mine in John Martin's department store.

Did you get bored at school?

28:00 I suppose it was years later when they actually found out what was wrong. I think my mother didn't want me to have any eye tests because she was scared of what they might tell her. This is what I think the problem was. I know some of my aunties and uncles were the same with their children. They didn't want to know. I never remember as a child having any eye tests. When I was in the

28:30 army in 4 Battalion I found out in the army that with education you get more money. So I thought, "I'll be in this," and I started doing some education courses. One education officer at one of these classes I was doing said to me, "You've got the answer right, but you've got the problem wrong." So when I was writing off the blackboard the "3" looked like an "8" and a "7" looked different from a "7"

29:00 and I was writing down different figures to what I was reading on the blackboard. That's when the army sent me for a test and they found out I have what they called "wide vision" and it was hard for me to read white on black. They gave me glasses and then I could pass the tests. Whether that was the problem. I can remember as a youth I couldn't see the blackboard in school very well.

Did you mention that to the teachers?

No, well, classes in those days

29:30 were like 40 children in a class. It wasn't the teachers' fault, they just didn't have the time. We definitely didn't have the money. There was no freebies then.

Who were your teachers in primary school?

I can't remember their names now, it's so long ago.

What mischief did you get up to in primary school?

I was a bit of a clown. I remember one teacher, Miss Hayes.

30:00 If she ever left the room she'd put me up to monitor the class. I can remember Miss Hayes saying, "You send a thief to catch a thief," and she thought I was one of the bad ones, so she thought I'd be good

at catching anybody that was bad. I had a fairly easygoing attitude and I was a bit of a clown. Everything was funny to me. That did change later on.

Did your humour get you into hot water

30:30 **at primary school?**

Yeah. I remember one day a girl fell over and I laughed. The teacher said, "Why did you laugh at that girl falling over?" She was rather a large, well endowed girl. I said, "Well, she would have only bounced up again." I could in a bit of strife for that.

In primary school, what did you wanna be when you grew up?

I was interested in cooking, but I was also interested in animals.

31:00 If I had the opportunity and been academically capable, I suppose I would have like to work with animals. That wasn't to be. I left school and went and worked at John Martin's. I worked there for 3 years. Ended up as a window dresser. From a window dresser to a combat soldier. Boy.

31:30 I've never told any of the guys that.

High school didn't appeal to you academically.

Yeah, I couldn't handle it.

Were your mates heading off to high school?

Yeah, most of them went off to high school. I took a lot of time with sport. I played amateur league football, district cricket, I was interested in sport. By

32:00 the time I was 16 and got a motorbike I was interested in motorbikes, girls and football.

When you arrived on your first day at John Martin's were you aware you'd become a window dresser?

First off I worked in the haberdashery department as what they called a trolley boy. You brought the stock

32:30 from the stockroom up to the display room. Then they had an opportunity to go to the display department and I thought, "This is better than pushing a trolley up and down." So then I went into the display department at John Martin's and become a trainee window dresser. It was a bit of a shock, but I handled that OK.

33:00 **Which John Martin branch was it?**

It was only the one in those days. It was the one in Rundle Mall.

How did you get to work every day?

Motorbike. Once I was 16. Before that a pushbike. We lived right on the edge of North Adelaide, so I rode a pushbike to work and back. When I was 16 I got a motorbike and went on that to work and back.

What were some of your jobs as a window dresser?

Doing interior displays at times,

33:30 dressing windows. Helping the senior window dressers go and get stock and arrange windows. Go and pick the dummies up from the dummy room. Then you go walking through the department store with a naked dummy and the only way you could carry it was one hand cross the top and one hand across the bottom. So you used to get some funny looks. I was pretty naïve.

John Martin's is big on its Christmas pageants.

I was in three Christmas

34:00 pageants.

What were you in the pageants?

Carnival head twice and a clown once. So I was in the right place. Carnival head and a clown. That was me. I met some interesting people there. That's the first time I ran into people with different preferences. They never annoyed me and I have no problems that way with people that

34:30 may be homosexual or whatever. I was never molested or anything like that. I was a pretty wild boy, so I had no problems looking after myself.

As a window dresser, what was your favourite display?

I was allowed once to dress a Rundle Street window. Before that you could only do the windows on North Terrace and down the

35:00 chow street on the side. The first time I ever dressed a Rundle Street window I thought I was little King Dick.

What was the theme of the window?

Manchester, dress materials. We used to jewellery and all this sort of thing. You did a bit of silk printing as well.

35:30 Painting of things, setting up backdrops and all that sort of thing. It was fairly interesting. I thought John Martins, under the Haywoods, was quite a good place to work. It was a good family store. And there was plenty of young girls there.

Who took your fancy?

There was a couple during the three years I was there. No one special. It was like a smorgasbord.

36:00 **Did you date any of your colleagues?**

The girls, yes. Always. The Haywoods used to throw a prom ball once a year in the Palais, which is opposite, not there anymore, used to be opposite the Royal Adelaide Hospital. We'd go across there to a ball. They really looked after their staff. I remember taking a couple of girls to a couple of different balls.

36:30 There was something like 600 girls working there.

What was the first motorbike you ever had?

What was the first one? My Mum would only let me buy a little bike, so it'd be a say Bantam. It had swing arm suspension though, so it was OK. I had that for a couple of years and

37:00 then I had a 500 single BSA. Then I got a real one, a 650 twin, Gold Flash. That was a real motorbike.

What were your mates riding around on?

Most of them were on 500 singles or at that time Triumphs were the big bike to have. My BSA had a low ratio gearbox because it had had a sidecar on it. So they'd all try to race me, but they couldn't beat me through the gears 'cos I had a low

37:30 ratio gearbox.

Where did you go racing?

We'd just hang around. Go to the Semaphore [beach], go down at Taperoo. Venture up to Elizabeth. We'd venture up there sometimes. That was rough. We weren't a gang or anything. We were just a group of guys that liked riding motorbikes and having a bit of fun. One of the guys was a guy called

38:00 Phil Wylie. Him and I became close during the early motorbike days and he was a mechanic for Gav Ross that rode motorbikes at Roly Park, which doesn't exist anymore. He was apprentice with J. N. Taylor who was a motorbike mechanic. He was a good mate to have.

Where did the passion for motorbikes start?

I remember my Mum saying, "I don't want you to get a motorbike."

38:30 So I suppose that made me want to get a motorbike. I suppose the thrill. A little bit of danger. Got the adrenalin going.

What's it like riding a motorbike?

I loved riding my motorbike. When I finally saw the light and gave up alcohol in 1999 I said to my present wife "Well, I've given up booze.

39:00 I think I might have to buy a motorbike." So I had to get a motorbike licence again, which meant I had to ride a 250. So I rode a 250. I went and did the Ride Safe, which is a school they have for motorbike riders. I suppose I was the oldest guy doing it. That didn't bother me. I think it was quite enlightening doing those courses. The traffic conditions have changed since I rode a motorbike. Now I've got a

39:30 big 750 V twin. If I get a bit P-ed off with things or a bit down I find that psychologically for me to go and hop on the motorbike and go for a ride is a fair bit of release.

When you were out riding, was it easy to pick up the girls on the back of a bike?

When I had a big bike. They didn't like getting on the back of a Phantom. It was 650, it was OK. By then I was playing amateur league football.

40:00 I played amateur league football for Kilburn. Great bunch of guys. I think those were pretty good days really.

Did you have any accidents when you were first riding?

Yeah, a couple. There was always, before the Mr Al Cohol, yeah I think drinking and riding a motorbike these days, but when you were

40:30 fairly fit and young it was no fear so you'd go and have a few beers and hop on the motorbike. I fell off eventually.

What were some of the injuries?

Not real bad. Just roll around the ground and get up again. I never hurt myself too bad.

How did your mum react when you came back with motorbike injuries?

Not real happy. I was her little boy.

41:00 I was the last one home. So she didn't want to lose me through a motorbike. She accepted it.

Tape 2

00:33 **You were in Adelaide for most of your teen years?**

I left John Martin's after three years. I had had a relationship with a girl and she told me things weren't too well. So I gave notice and packed up my bags and ran into Melbourne.

What was in Melbourne?

My brother

01:00 was in Melbourne, so I ran to him and told him. I think she was only bluffing, but I never found out. I was gonna get out of Adelaide pretty quick.

Where did you land when you got to Melbourne?

I went by train. He was living in St Kilda with his second relationships. I lived with my brother and his wife to be later on, they got married,

01:30 for about 12 months. I went from a window dresser to a brickies labourer. I'll tell you I used to come home and my hands were bleeding. We lived in St Kilda. St Kilda in the early 1960s was fairly rough, so I had to get myself educated in life very, very quick. There was no mum looking after me or the soft window dresser job. I was a brickie labourer with some of the hardest guys you'll ever meet in

02:00 your life.

How was your mum when you left?

She wasn't very happy. She didn't know why I was leaving. She did find out later on. I just said I wanted to leave and I was sick of working at John Martin's and I wanted to leave. She said, "You can't leave until you give notice." I said, "I've already given notice, so I'm going to Melbourne." So off I went to become a brickies labourer.

That is quite a jump from window dressing to brickies labourer.

I know.

02:30 **How did you cope physically?**

My brother was a fairly rough guy. Pretty violent in some ways. He didn't take crap from anyone. So if anyone said anything to me; he'd been in Korea and he was pretty free with his hands and he taught me the same way. I soon had to fight my own way out of battles. He'd sit back and watch me get beaten.

03:00 I remember we went to the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] and there was this guy that kept picking on me. My brother said, "What are you gonna do to him, Mac?" We called one another Mac. I said, "I'm gonna take him behind the shed and belt him." He said, "Away you go. Don't talk about it." So I did and I did beat this guy. This guy was about 17 and this guy was about a 40 year old man and a man. I did beat him. My brother was so proud of me that I had

03:30 actually beaten somebody up with my hands.

What did this man say to you to antagonise you?

Just picking on me 'cos I was the easiest one to pick on I suppose. He'd call me "kid" and all this sort of thing. So in the football in those days you could drink anywhere in the football. I'd had a few beers and was with all these hard cases. The more beers you had the bigger you felt. So I belted this bloke up.

04:00 **Where did you learn to fight?**

Survival in Melbourne in those days. You had to. If you didn't fight you got beaten up all the time. My

brother was quite prepared to see me get beaten up until I could look after myself. After that I had no problems. That was the first little victory.

What were the men you worked with like?

They were all knockabout guys. Very rough, colourful guys. Most of them

04:30 were living pretty rough. First buildings site was Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. We had all sorts of people working on Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. We lived alongside St Moritz for a while. We used to have to shift fairly regularly. Something to do with not paying the rent. So we shifted around. The 12 months I was in Melbourne we shifted around quite a few places. Usually at night. Ended

05:00 up in Loch Street, St Kilda. I was fairly naïve and didn't know what Loch Street was. It was the main working class girls area.

Is that the red light district?

The red light district, yeah.

Were girls walking up and down the street?

Yeah, and I thought they were nice girls and my brother used to laugh at me. I suppose they were nice girls. They were working for a living. We got to know some of them just

05:30 socially. They were OK. There was nothing wrong with them. Good girls some of them.

Were any of the men you worked with ex World War II?

Not that I can remember. There was a couple of other Korean War guys. In those days my brother didn't talk much about it. He was just interested in working, drinking, going to the football.

And the other blokes? Did they say anything about Korea or

06:00 **what war was like?**

Not much at all. That was growing up, that 12 months in Melbourne. I had to grow up fairly quick to survive, which I don't think ever hurt me. The hard work definitely didn't hurt me. Showed me another side of life.

What was the biggest lesson you learned during that growing up period?

When you see something, shut your mouth. If you did see it, you didn't see it. I remember the

06:30 police used to come into the hotels. They used to all gather around me and touch my head and push me down on the floor. So the police would walk, 'cos it was 21 years the age to drink. I was only 17. You got to learn the rules of life fairly quick.

How long were you in St Kilda before you enlisted?

I was there for 12 months and I returned to Adelaide.

07:00 I went back playing football and got a job in Adelaide. Worked in a couple of different jobs, but it was in those days you walk out of one job straight into the next. So if you didn't like something you'd tell someone to stick it and you'd get another job.

Why did you move back to Adelaide?

I don't know. I suppose I'd had enough of Melbourne and wanted to come home to my Mum and see how things

07:30 were there. I just come back to Adelaide. Took off from where I left off. Didn't go back to John Martin's again. I just worked in the car yards, a meat processing establishment. One of the lads that lived across the road had joined the army and came home in his uniform. This looked all right.

08:00 He said, "Go and join the army," 'cos he knew that I hadn't been educated very well. He told me there were education opportunities and trade opportunities. So I thought, "I'll join the army and I'll get a trade. I wanna be a cook. That's it. I'll join the army and go and be a cook." So instead of giving me a ladle they gave me a rifle.

What was the day like when you enlisted?

08:30 There were other things that helped be along to join the army. The girl I was going out with at the time told me she was pregnant. I thought "Hang on. I've already gone to Melbourne once, this time I'll go somewhere different." So I joined the army. I don't know whether it was just to get away from the responsibilities or just thought I'd better get out of the scene for a while and I joined the army and went to Kapooka and

09:00 she kept writing to me and sent me photographs showing her pregnant. I thought "I suppose one of these days I wanna get married." We were fairly close. We were both young and fairly close to one

another. She came from a fairly rough sort of family. When you think back on it I was most probably a way out of that bad family environment. I never thought of that at the time. Young, stupid.

09:30 We got married in October 1963 while I was at the infantry centre.

When you enlisted in Adelaide, where did you go?

From there I went to Kapooka.

No, where did you go to enlist?

At Keswick. There was a recruiting office in, it wasn't in Perry Street then, it was in the city of Adelaide. Grouper Street or something like that.

10:00 I enlisted and we were held in Keswick for about a week till they got enough up for a draft to be moved to Kapooka. I suppose about a week in Keswick. No one yelled at you there. It was OK.

What did you do in that week?

You swept gutters and painted things and just work party type things. "This is all right. This is not bad."

10:30 **What were the other men like that you were with in Keswick?**

I was 19. Most of them were about the same age except for a couple of older ones that were joining up for trade enlistments. This was to better themselves with trade education and all those sorts of things. Diesel mechanics and tradespersons. There was a couple of them.

11:00 You were together for a week and got to Kapooka and split up a bit then.

What was the training in Kapooka?

I remember getting off the train. There's this bloke yelling at me. I said, "Who's he yelling at?" I said, "Don't yell at me like that." Well, I found out he could yell at me like that because he was a drill instructor. A

11:30 sergeant at that. So it was a bit of a shock to the system. I got into a fair bit of strife there. I had a fair bit to say for myself that I found out it was better to shut up about to save yourself. I remember one night I had to go and clean the shower block with a nail brush just in number 1s. So I thought after that, "I don't think I'll get into any cheek anymore."

12:00 When we finally left Kapooka we have a march out parade and all this sort of thing. A lot of the guys had their family come along, but I had no family to come. I got presented with a cup for the most improved recruit. So it tells you how bad I must have been originally to get the most improved.

What was recruitment training?

We got there and you were issued,

12:30 everything was stamped 1941, 1942, hobnail boots, old type uniforms, Second World War webbing, pretty rough gear. You had to get used to that idea of having this older equipment. You had to blanco [paint] the webbing and try and make do with what you had been issued, which we found out in later years that a lot of this stuff was

13:00 so bad, especially the boot wear, it damaged people feet later on. I don't think the army knew any better at the time.

What training did you do?

Just the basic army training. How to march, salute, drill, use weapons, 7.62 SLR [self-loading rifle] we were using. We used the 9 millimetre OMC [Owen sub-machine carbines].

13:30 We were introduced then to the M60 machinegun.

What was infantry training like?

That was recruit training at Kapooka. When you finish there you go and do your corps training.

What was it like using the weapons?

They were heavy and they made a lot of bloody noise. It was quite OK. I didn't mind it. You

14:00 started to get into the part of mateship and relying on one another, which it's meant to be. That you've gotta rely on one another to survive. So it's basically just drilling, marching, PE [physical exercise], fitness and I had my first fight in Kapooka in the army.

What was that over?

They really test you. They psych you. So they gave us a night's

- 14:30 leave in Kapooka. It was the first time we'd been out in uniform. "This is OK." Unrestricted drinking. "We're in the army now, we can go into the pubs and drink." We had a fair bit to drink and the army next morning, instead of an easy morning they decided to take you on a long run with a hangover. One of the guys
- 15:00 after the run was being physically sick. The drill instructor said, "If you don't stop making noise you're gonna be running around the circuit again." I don't know what it was, it would have been a 10 mile circuit. One of the guys said, "Shut him up over there or I'll punch him." It was a friend of mine that was being sick so I just punched him and knocked him right out.

15:30 That was my first little fight in the army. Another victory.

What discipline did you get for that?

For fighting? I think it was part of the training. I think it certainly was. They didn't mind you having a little bit of a stoush. Showed you had fighting ability.

How were your mates at Kapooka?

I got on

- 16:00 very well there with an aborigine guy. First time I had much to do with aborigines. Him and I became quite close. He was very quiet to start off with. When we'd go up to the canteen him and I'd go together and another couple of lads. When we were in Kapooka you get allocated your corps. The blokes that I became close with all got allocated different corps. I got infantry 'cos I was a bit of a dum head.
- 16:30 I went to infantry. The aborigine guy went to engineers. A couple of other guys went to artillery and some to armoured corps. The only place for me was infantry.

What happened to your ambitions to cook?

I put in when you were given allocation I thought I'd like to go to catering corps or armoured corps, 'cos this mate of mine across the road was in armoured corps. Bu that time

- 17:00 he had actually gone to OCS [officer cadet school]. He was in OCS then. I thought "That's OK. He'll be an officer and I'll be there with him." I found out it doesn't work that way. I went to infantry and went to my corps training at Ingleburn.

By the time you left Kapooka, what were your impressions of the army?

I thought it was OK. I didn't mind the discipline after I'd accepted it.

- 17:30 You had to learn fairly quick. I rather enjoyed it.

How did you cope with the army's intolerance for individuals and clowns?

I got into trouble to start off with, but I found out that you had to tow the line. This also helps you later on when you get to the stage when you're in charge of people. You can actually try to analyse how people under you are thinking

- 18:00 and how you've gotta manipulate them to think the way you want them to think. You can do it. Not always by the book, but the book's only a guide.

You said to got into trouble very early on. Was that the incident with the yelling sergeant?

That and a few other things. I remember I laughed at one instructor one day and that's when I had to go and scrub the toilet block with a nail brush. I didn't laugh at him again.

Why did you laugh at

- 18:30 **him?**

He was a little peacock. Like those little angry ant type of thing. He was as good as an instructor. Later on I saw him and he was still there years later. That's the only place he should have been too. Breaking in the civilians.

Once you got posted to infantry, where did you go to?

Ingleburn. In

- 19:00 Ingleburn you do your actual infantry training. Tactics, map reading, a little bit of tracking, a little bit of field craft, the basics of an infantry soldier. Then I started to grab hold of it. I thought that was pretty interesting and by then I'd accepted I was in the infantry and that was it. My big goal was to be a cook.
- 19:30 The
- armoured corps had gone and I thought "This is OK. It's not a bad bunch of guys." You started to get closer to people in the infantry centre more than in recruit training because then you realise you're most probably gonna go to the same units. The quality of the instructors was a lot better in the infantry centre. But the army classes people where they should go. They've got ways of working everyone out.

20:00 Later on you find all these things out; why; where?

What appealed most to you in the infantry?

The closeness of people. You had mates that you relied on and they relied on you. You got very close to people. I never really felt that so much before.

20:30 The infantry work and the physical hardness, I enjoyed that. I didn't mind the route marches or going through combat training. I thought it was OK. A bit of a challenge. I've always hated failing anything. I've failed plenty of things, but I never liked it. I never liked being last. It made you push yourself. Made you find your own ability. That's part

21:00 of the whole picture of being in the army or being a soldier, to see how far you can go.

What were you best at in Ingleburn when you started?

I suppose I looked at ground tracking. I thought that was quite interesting although they only touched on the basis of it. Field craft, I liked that. I liked being out in the

21:30 field rather than back in camp. In the field it was a lot more relaxing. You take things as they come. I enjoyed the field activities.

What were your instructors like?

By then most of them were ex Korea, Malay First Emergency, a couple of Second World War guys were still hanging around. They were pretty good all over. Officers were

22:00 pretty good. No real complaints there. I thought it was pretty good.

Did any of the officers stand out in your mind?

You never got that close to them in those situations. They were there as a figurehead within that group of people, but you never really got to know them. Not like you did when you were in a combat unit. They were there, you knew they were the boss and you

22:30 got to know your platoon sergeant a lot better. Especially in Ingleburn in regards to they were the platoon sergeant. He was the one to be feared and the one to listen to. You realised that even the corporal listened to the platoon sergeant. So they should too.

Did you have any leave in Ingleburn?

Yeah, I got leave when I went home and got married. So then I was a young

23:00 married soldier. That was the sort of thing to do in those days. I suppose you'd free your conscience for your deeds. So I married the girl after a few problems with the padres. I don't think they were all that cracked up to what they should be. Some of them are a bit more soldiers than what they are religious instructors. I had a couple of ablutions with one of those.

23:30 I suppose he had his point of view about mixed marriages. Mixed marriage in those days wasn't black and white. A mixed marriage in those days was a catholic and a non-catholic. One particular officer wasn't gonna sign the paper that I'd done these religious instructions to marry a catholic girl. I said "That's OK, don't worry about it. I'll go to the registry office." He soon changed his mind then. So you had to speak up

24:00 for yourself. I got married and then went back to Ingleburn.

Did you feel any different going back to Ingleburn as a married man?

No. She was living in Adelaide and I was living in Sydney. No. Didn't make that much difference.

Had she had the baby yet?

No, not yet. She was still carrying the baby. She didn't have him until after. She had him

24:30 when I was in 1 Battalion.

After Ingleburn you were posted with 1RAR.

1RAR at Holsworthy. I always remember the day I what they called marched in. We came in on truck from Ingleburn to Holsworthy, which is only across the road virtually. The flags were on half mast. I said to myself "Why the hell are the flags on half mast?" By this you're taught a

25:00 little bit about flags, why they were half mast. When you were a civilian you didn't have a clue. The flags were on half mast. That was the day President Kennedy was assassinated. So I'll always remember that day.

What was the mood like at Holsworthy that day?

Holsworthy that day you marched into a very historic battalion that had

- 25:30 great successes in Korea and had battle honours. They tell you this straight away. I was posted to a rifle company, Charlie Company 1RAR. That first night I was there I got into trouble with the police. The next morning, I think it was a stand down day when I marched in. The next day I had to front with the company CSM [company sergeant major]. He said "The police are looking for you. Who are you?" I said, "I marched in here yesterday." He said, "I don't even know you and you've got the police looking for you." So I got into trouble with the police the first night I was in 1 Battalion.

What was that over?

Drunken driving. So I had to go to court. That was the first time the CSM met me. He said, "I haven't even met you and you've got the police looking for you."

Was this an offence you had done at Holsworthy or Ingleburn?

At Holsworthy the day I marched in.

- 26:30 The night I marched in I went out and got drunk and had a car accident and the police were looking for me. So he said, "Not a real good way to start, son." It wasn't either. We were in a professional unit then. I found a lot of the older guys, I was 19, you had a lot of the older guys when you started go and do things like weapon training and firing
- 27:00 on the range, especially route marches. By this stage you're doing a route march with full combat gear, steel helmet, the whole lot. I'd never done it with the steel helmet before. Fully loaded up with equipment and weapon. The older guys helped the younger guys, they really did. They'd hold you up if you looked like you were falling over and just about carry you so that if you started the route march as a platoon you finished it as a
- 27:30 platoon. Some of these guys were professional private soldiers. All they were ever gonna be was private soldiers. They were quite happy being private soldiers. They were actually calling their NCOs [non commissioned officer] by their first name. It was a bit friendly with these guys, but they were pretty close. A good bunch of guys. Some of them had already been in Malaya. Some of them were left there ex-Korea like the senior NCOs. So it was a good bunch of guys. That's when
- 28:00 we were on sprinkler force, which is 1RAR were handling at the time where a rifle company went on standby at a time. I remember they issued us with our rifles to put in our lockers. I thought, "Hang on, what's going on here? They're actually giving me my rifle to look after in my own locker. This is fair dinkum now." Sprinkler force was to go into Laos. You were ready
- 28:30 a company at a time to go down to Williamstown and be put on a Herc [Hercules aircraft] and be sent to Laos. This is before they decided whether they were gonna have Vietnam. They were gonna have a stoush somewhere, whether it'd be Laos, Vietnam, what. As far as we knew as private soldiers it was Laos we were going to if the balloon went up. What they'd do was put you into 1942 Studebaker trucks,
- 29:00 left hand drive, left over from the Second World War. They'd drive you out to Williamstown RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base and they'd drive you up and down the runway saying, "You're now in a Hercules taking off." "This isn't right. 1942 Studebaker." That was part of the training to show you how long. That was for the administration and within the battalion to work out how long it'd take you to get there, get on the plane and be off to Laos.
- 29:30 It was a bit of a wakeup call. You actually had your weapon with you all the time.

How were you feeling at this time, knowing it was becoming quite imminent that you would have to participate in action?

Well it wasn't too sure of my tucker I think. I thought, "This is fair dinkum." It was just a little training exercise. It was a bit of a wakeup call. I started taking things a fair bit serious after that. We were even issued with rations and

- 30:00 our equipment had to be packed on the end of our bed all the time. We could go to the canteen. I think we left one person in the hut at a time, to actually make sure the weapons we all right. They wouldn't do that sort of thing these days. In those days we didn't have those internal threats that we have today. Looked like being fair dinkum. It didn't eventuate. There's not that many
- 30:30 people understand how close we were to a combat situation even prior to Vietnam. Although some of the people had started to go to Vietnam as early as 1962.

What other preparations were you undergoing for Laos?

We were on life firing ranges about every day. Weapon skills,

- 31:00 firing M60s, weapon training, a lot of field training. I think we had a fair idea something was gonna happen sooner or later. I was then, I don't know what it was then. 5 months I was only there in 1 Battalion and the boys had started to form this brand new battalion in Woodside, South Australia.

31:30 **What does field training consist of?**

Tactics to enemy contact like if you were ambushed what your drill was. Where you place certain weapons. Everyone had a spot to go so you all had some sort of idea where everyone was. It was a drill for ambush left, ambush right,

32:00 for when you hit enemy contact front. I always thought to myself, "I wonder if this ever works when you actually are in a combat situation." I found out later on, yeah, it does work to a degree. When there's live rounds the adrenalin slows your mind and body down a bit, but it's basically training you to an immediate situation. It does

32:30 help. It seemed to help all the way through.

You mentioned the older men looking out for the younger guys.

They did. They made sure when it was time to leave the boozers [pubs]. They'd look after the younger blokes.

Who did you become close to at this time?

No one really in particular. I had a lot of

33:00 respect for my section commander at the time. I can't remember his name now, but he was an older soldier. He knew everything. He was gonna guide me, I hoped. It's just generally within your section and your platoon you became an identity of one virtually. So if you were in the boozers and someone from another platoon gave you a bit of a hard time they were giving the whole platoon a hard time so you clubbed together then.

33:30 Even if there were the odd person that wasn't liked so much by the majority, 'cos there's always different quips in every job. That's what it was, a job. You might have one guy that was an outsider to everyone else, but the platoon still looked after that guy too, even though he may not have been one of the favourites. This is what some of the older guys taught us younger guys, "Don't leave your mate out.

34:00 He might be in trouble. You go and look after him." You did what you were told. These guys might belt you in the head for not looking after someone. It was pretty good.

These men around you had experience with action?

Korea and Malaya, yes, 'cos 1RAR had just finished a tour of duty,

34:30 2RAR had, it would have been some 4 years beforehand 1RAR would have been in the Malayan Emergency. I think it was 1957, something like that, which wasn't that far down the track. These guys then seemed to be professional private soldiers. That's all they ever wanted to be.

What did they teach you to expect in the field?

If you get into a situation

35:00 and you don't do what you're told or your reactions are too slow you can get yourself killed. So you're not going out there to get killed so you start to take notice and get the knowledge from these older soldiers. I think it's just as much the older privates as what it was the junior senior NCOs that seemed to guide you.

35:30 **Can you explain what sprinkler force means?**

It was a ready reaction force that was a company at a time. In those days you had pentropic battalions which had 5 rifle companies and 5 platoons per company. Now it's all tropic, which is a lighter battalion. Each company would go on standby

36:00 for a given time. I can only remember doing it once nearly before the Christmas of 1963 when Charlie Company was on ready reaction. The idea was that that company, the married guys were still allowed to go home, but their weapons were in their lockers locked. Their kit was all packed. They could go home. The first lot of guys, which was ready reaction

36:30 company would be then prepared and would move straight to Williamstown and be flown straight out to supposedly Laos and then establish a firm base for the rest of the battalion to follow. That first rifle company would not go into a combat situation until the other parts of the battalion were on the ground. So you were the first leg in. That was the way it was.

37:00 **Woodside was now creating 4RAR?**

4RAR was being formed at Woodside and in I think 9th or 12th of March I was posted from 1RAR to 4RAR at Woodside. This brand new battalion. I packed up my gear, said goodbye to the guys I'd known

37:30 for 5 months and headed towards Woodside. So did a lot of other guys from 1RAR and 2RAR 'cos 3RAR was in Malaya at the time. So you didn't have a very big army. Only had three battalions and 4 was gonna be the fourth. So it was a brand new battalion and off we went. Joined this new battalion. That

was the start of a

38:00 great relationship. I think that was the time I really started to understand military procedures was more when I got to 4 Battalion than any time during 1. 4 Battalion was a very close battalion. They had family orientated, very good company commanders, excellent battalion commander.

38:30 **What was it about the battalion commander that stood out for you?**

He was a soldier's soldier. His name was David Thomson, he's still alive. I've always remembered that man as a well spoken gentleman, but a good soldier. He didn't have to yell at you for you to move. He'd only

39:00 ask you and you'd move faster him asking you rather than someone yelling at you. That's when a battalion becomes a battalion. He was so good to his soldiers. He made such an improvement in the army as a whole. He did later on take over during the Vietnam War as director of infantry. As far as I was concerned he should have gone higher. Everyone that served under him,

39:30 I can't ever recall one soldier, on junior or senior NCO or officer ever saying a detrimental thing against David Thomson. I think I owe him quite a bit too, the way he trained the battalion, the way he was so approachable to private soldiers. He didn't seem to, there was no gap. What he did for the army prior to the

40:00 army becoming involved in Vietnam was bring the army out of sort of a dead situation and started to get new equipment. He really pushed for the infantry soldier. That's why his posting as director of infantry was, he was the real guy for the moment.

4RAR was made up of men from other battalions.

All the other battalions, yeah.

How long did it take for

40:30 **you guys to gel as 4RAR?**

Pretty quick. I was pretty lucky. I went into A company. My CSM was a Korean veteran. We had lance corporals, Korean veterans. We had a lot of guys that had come over from the SAS [Special Air Service] that were say senior private soldiers in the SAS that were promoted to junior NCO and came over

41:00 because you had to get some strength within the battalion. You had guys coming from all over the place to form 4 Battalion and you couldn't have asked for a clique-ier bunch of guys that got together and really got stuck into it. We were all only little boys. That's all we were. You look back now and you think how you moulded yourself later on when you became a section

41:30 commander, which I did, and a platoon sergeant, which I did, I think those days of 4 Battalion helped me form my attitude, rightly or wrongly, on how I handled people. It was a great experience to serve in 4 Battalion.

Tape 3

00:49 **4RAR. David Thomson. What kind of man was he?**

He was a great leader. He was very approachable

01:00 to all ranks. This is the first time I'd experienced where you became close to your senior officers, your field officers. You got to know and understand company commanders better. You got to understand your battalion commander and he was a family orientated man. He was always worried about the welfare of the soldiers' families. His wife was always involved in

01:30 trying to help the young soldiers' young wives. So it was a sort of a big family. That's they way he wanted it. If we did a battalion route march, which we did on several occasions, he was there. Not like some of the others I'd seen before and after, he walked with the soldiers. He was a great inspiration. I think having someone

02:00 like him as a young private soldier, he was someone to really look up to. Everyone in the battalion did.

Where were you based when you first joined them?

When I was posted to 4RAR we were posted to Woodside. The battalion was raised on the 1st of February 1964. It was in March that I marched in so it was right at the very beginning of 4RAR.

02:30 We started then our company, platoon and section training all over the state. We went to the Flinders Ranges and carried out exercises. We went to Cultana outside Port Augusta, El Alamein training area. We went up there and carried out company, platoon and battalion exercises. We went in the Flinders Ranges and

- 03:00 carried out some exercises. You wouldn't be allowed to do these things today, but we did those things. It was a lot of physical training, a lot of our training for ready reaction as to contact exercises and you got to know your section commanders very well. I was lucky. My section commander was a guy called Tom Burke. I think he set the pace for a lot of us.
- 03:30 He was an older soldier. He was a big, hard man. I don't remember him ever charging anybody because he had a way of sorting things out himself. If you mucked up he'd just punch you out. He was a big man, a hard man, but by hell we all learned something from him. It was then you started to understand
- 04:00 the military a little bit better under guys like him. He was a hard drinker. He'd go out drinking with his section. We'd end up in blues together and all sorts of things. It was a pretty good time. You got to know your section 2ICs [second in command] and all the guys around you. You become very, very close. Even to this day with some of those guys I'm actually seeing
- 04:30 one of my very good friends, am ex 4 Battalion guy, we see one another once a fortnight. We had a coffee and a bit of a chat. Talk over things.

What blues would you get into?

We'd go somewhere where there was another platoon having a bit of a booze-up and we'd have a booze-up and have a bit of a rough up. Just boy things.

- 05:00 That's all part of the bonding process that takes place. Even though you don't realise it at the time. That was all part of the bond, the mateship, trying to out beat the next platoon by doing something faster and quicker than them. It's all part of the military training. You don't realise it's happening, but it is happening to you.

How much did group pressure influence you, that bonding?

- 05:30 If you got someone, like I had Tom Burke to lead us as a section. It means a lot. You start to learn. When you got to that stage you knew you had to do what you were told by these guys because he's gonna punch you. Not charge you, punch you. So that was a pretty good attitude to have, I think. They frown on that these days.
- 06:00 I think that initial training in that situation, because most the guys that were private soldiers, by the time, later on when Vietnam started, a lot of these guys like myself and other private soldiers within that group become junior and senior NCOs during the Vietnam campaign. I know that myself as a section commander when I did go to Vietnam, I tried to model myself on
- 06:30 Tom, but unfortunately Tom lost two legs and an arm in Vietnam on his second tour of duty with the 7RAR. That was his life as a soldier. He handled that quite well.

Can you tell us what was going on in the lead up?

At that stage we're talking about 1964. Guys are

- 07:00 getting pulled out of different units to go to Vietnam as advisors. By then they realised they were gonna send a battalion to Vietnam. Not sure when, but one of the battalions was gonna go. David Thomson really wanted it to be 4 Battalion. The battalion commander of 1RAR wanted it to be 1RAR. So we
- 07:30 were little pawns getting pressured to become operational as quick as we could to go to Vietnam. However, the army had already laid down for 4 Battalion to replace 3RAR, which was then in Borneo on part of its 2 year posting to Malaysia. So the book had already been written that we were going to go to Malaya and Borneo
- 08:00 as part of the SEATO pact [South East Asia Treaty Organisation] at the time, it does exist now, but that was part of SEATO. That's where we ended up by going in 1965. We had a bit over 18 months to become operational as a battalion ready to go overseas.

How commonplace is the inter-battalion rivalry?

It's good.

- 08:30 you'd have sports days. Each platoon within the particular companies would try and outdo another platoon from another company in any field exercises or in sports, soccer, football, cricket, whatever you were playing. Even a tug of war was taken real seriously. 'Cos you didn't wanna be beaten by anybody. It's all part of the bonding things.
- 09:00 As a young private soldier you don't understand this is happening to you, but it is, and that's part of the army technique.

In what way were 1RAR and 4RAR both eager to go

They both wanted to be the first battalion to go to Vietnam, there's no doubt about that.

In what way did that influence you

09:30 **guys?**

I don't think we really understood it at the time. By the time it gets down to the private soldier it's split up a bit and you knew something was going on more than getting ready for Malaya. We were getting introduced to more modern equipment because of David Thomson. David Thomson then started to bring some new things into the army as far as

10:00 rations for soldiers. There was never a really good ration pack prior to these days. Things like the combat boots. We were still getting issued with 1942 hobnail boots. David Thomson wanted better footwear for his soldiers. He wanted better clothing, better weaponry. All these things were happening. The army in that period was actually moving ahead faster than

10:30 it had done for maybe 20 years before. Especially with equipment and weapons. Yeah. It was a big step up. You were lucky to have had someone like David Thomson that had the ability to get things done. We were at Woodside. All we had was jungle greens as clothing. Woodside gets very cold during the winter. All we

11:00 had was a jumper. You were issued with one jumper. That's what we had. So that jumper you were wearing in the field was the same jumper you had to go on parade with back in the battalion area. You were never issued with a second jumper. One for the field and one for the parade ground. Then he started to get us issued with second hand

11:30 battledress pants. Just the trousers. To try and keep us warm. How he did some of the things he did I don't know. He got us American combat jackets. We'd never seen a combat jacket. They were second hand. We got them. I don't know how he did some of the things. He worked with the rations and catering divisions to improve one man ration packs, which were terrible

12:00 before he stepped in and started to build all this sort of stuff up. I think this was going on in other units as well, but being in that unit you saw the transition of time and things. So he was a man for the moment. We really appreciated what he tried to do for the soldiers.

The terrain

12:30 **is different in Malay and South Australia.**

Yeah, when we got there we were issued with, we went to Malaya in 1965 and when we went there we were all issued with later model British issue material. Some of the British weapons were issued with the

13:00 7.62 Bren gun. David Thomson was also very initial in starting off the tracking teams. I think the army before that had used dogs in Malaya, but these dogs were borrowed from the British Army. He was the first one that got Australian dogs to be trained as tracker dogs to take to Malaya. Not borrow dogs when they got there,

13:30 but take them with him. He had the help of a well known South Australian ex soldier who was a Commonwealth policeman, Mason Clarke initially to help with these 4 dogs that were donated to the army. Started training them. They finished their training in Kota Tinggi in Johor Bahru in Malaysia under the war veterinary corps who I

14:00 later did some training with. That was all started from Adelaide.

How did you become aware you were going?

We knew pretty early in the peace that we were going to Malaya and Borneo. We didn't really understand at the time about Vietnam, not as a private soldier. We knew Vietnam was starting 'cos different senior NCOs were getting pulled out of units and going over as advisors

14:30 'cos they hadn't committed any ground forces until 1966, which was 1RAR anyhow. Right from the start we knew we were gonna go to Malaya and Borneo. We'd started to hear stories about some of the conflicts in Borneo with 3RAR who we were relieving. We were looking forward to getting stuck about it.

What did you expect before you left?

15:00 That we were gonna hopefully do the job we were trained to do. Be soldiers. We were looking forward to it. And a bit anxious in another way. Now you weren't gonna fire at targets, the target was gonna fire back at you possibly. So transition of time and started to realise you really had to be more careful and take notice of your training and

15:30 your weapons and all this sort of thing.

What pre-embarkation leave

We got pre-embarkation leave before we left Adelaide. We left in groups from Edinburgh on commercial aircraft, but it was a bit of a longer flight than the flight you'd take to day from South Australia to Singapore because at the time confrontation was on

- 16:00 in full swing between Indonesia and Malaysia. So our aircraft couldn't fly over Indonesian territory. Had to take the long way around to come into Singapore because there were military personnel onboard. Indonesian intelligence is quite good. It is still good. No matter what the politicians may want to say. They were
- 16:30 still being trained in Duntroon, their officers, while we were getting ready to go and fight them. So it's a bit of a funny game, isn't it? We left Adelaide and went to Singapore. From Singapore we flew to Malacca. Then Malacca was our main base of 28th Commonwealth Brigade at Terendak garrison. So that was our garrison there. We moved into there and started our
- 17:00 operations in Malaysia, which was mainly beach patrols, radar installation protection, this is the first time we got issued with live ammunition without being on a firing range. I had a 1941 OMC. Very old weapon. That was
- 17:30 my weapon at the time. I was a forward scout within my platoon. This Tommy Burke who was our section commander said it was better to have a married man as a forward scout 'cos he's gonna be more careful than having a single guy. That was his philosophy.

What do you think he meant by that?

A married guy had some reason to stay alive and come home to his wife and children, where a single guy didn't. So that was his thing. "If I'm gonna have someone as a forward scout I

- 18:00 might as well have a married man." He was pretty right. I was fairly careful.

On the flight over, who was on your plane?

When we went to Malaya from Edinburgh, our wives and children came with us 'cos it was a two year posting. Our wives and children were set up in married quarters in Malacca, or the Malacca area, or inter garrison

- 18:30 area. Nearly our whole rifle company was on that flight, the married personnel within that and the single guys, some of them had gone over on flights just for the single guys before that.

Were you travelling in uniform?

No. Civilian. Even when we went to Vietnam it was civilian dress. Snuck out at night and snuck in at night.

- 19:00 They were fairly careful with our flight that we didn't go over Indonesian territory 'cos I'm pretty sure the Indonesians would have known what flight was leaving for where, what's on it. They had no reason not to know when their officers were still being trained at Duntroon.

What was going on in Malacca when you arrived? How did you settle?

We settled into our married quarters and then you

- 19:30 took up your normal company positions within the perimeter, which was a safe area, like barracks. From there we operated out of these radar installations, beach patrols. There was one landing of Indonesian insurgents during that time down in an area. One of the other rifle companies were involved in collecting these guys that had been dropped off by boat without much
- 20:00 fuzz. I think they were glad to be taken prisoners actually. That was the first time we'd been issued with live ammunition and it was starting to look fair dinkum.

Describe the barracks and where you were living.

I had my married quarters just outside Malacca, which was about a three-quarters of an hour, half an hour

- 20:30 drive from Terendak. Then you had the Terendak garrison itself which had British units, New Zealand units and the Australian battalion, 4RAR, which had relieved 3RAR. It was a pretty easy life. It was a pretty good life. My wife had two children by then. She got an amah [local servant] to help her in the house to do housework. We got a lot more money 'cos
- 21:00 overseas allowance. Things were pretty good and comfortable. I started to save money for the first time in the army, 'cos you're getting a better allowance for being overseas. My aim was to buy a house when I returned so I started saving towards that. We knew we were gonna go to Borneo, we knew we were entitled to war service when we returned to Australia. So there were a few bonuses we were gonna
- 21:30 get that we hadn't had before.

How did you familiarise yourself with the area?

The first couple of weeks you settled in and got to know the layout of the place. It was rules and regulations about where you went, what you did, how you reacted to the local people, safety measures against what could happen with the local people.

22:00 **What did they tell you?**

"If there's a civilian disturbance, don't get involved, you get the hell out of there as quick as you can."
"If you're gonna go into Malacca on leave, go in groups of 3 or 4, don't go in on your own," because the communist Chinese were fairly active. We had actually been in Malacca sometimes when the riot police were called out and there was mainly against the communist Chinese or the ethnic

22:30 Chinese stirring up a bit of trouble. The Royal Malays didn't like the ethnic Chinese very much. They may say they were a happy community, but there seemed to be a definite class structure there between the Royal Malay, the Indians and the Chinese. You started to understand that pretty quick. Or explained to us there not to

23:00 get involved in anything. And once you saw the riot police, "Get out of town as quick as you can," which we did.

What did you see of Malacca when you went in?

By day it was quite OK. The police all had sub machineguns. They were well armed. They had it controlled pretty well, but I wouldn't have, at that stage of the game while confrontation was going on, gone in there at night. By day it was pretty right. A couple of times I'd see

23:30 disputes in there and just got the hell out of the place. That was what we were told to do. We were told about the local food, water, the local ladies. What to do and what not to do and what not to take with you. Being a married man of course, I didn't get involved in any of those things.

What did you do on leave?

24:00 We were there 6 months before we went into Borneo. They mainly were times of shakedown operations, getting acclimatised, getting used to the different equipment, getting used to working with different armies. 'Cos you had three different armies in one area. Getting used to the British aircraft, the Royal Malay

24:30 aircraft. By then we'd got an air wing attached to us as well. So we had our own air wing within the battalion, which was Bell Sioux aircraft. They were attached to the unit. They were great in a way, but they weren't much good in Borneo 'cos they were petrol driven and couldn't go over the high mountains. That time was a pretty good time. We had it pretty well.

25:00 Getting to know the countryside a bit and doing these odd tactical duties.

What was a typical tactical duty?

We were doing either beach patrols, radar installation patrols, patrols of the outer areas of Terendak. Some guys were involved in going to

25:30 Butterworth and doing some securing of the Butterworth area. These were rotated around. We knew we were getting into a combat situation. We were just alert and we were ready for action. We were teed right up. You still did sports days, you still had leave, you still had

26:00 your drill and your company parades, your battalion parades. In actual fact, one of the parades I was involved in was very historic. I was on the funeral party for Peter Badcoe. Peter Badcoe had already been killed in Vietnam and being a field officer, which is major, he is entitled to two companies as his honour guard for his funeral and he,

26:30 even though he was a South Australian he wanted to be buried in Terendak garrison. So I was the company that held vigil outside the church when the church service was on. It was fairly moving. We were doing our drill on top of concrete pavers and the drill between the

27:00 footwork and rifle work, just thundered on these pavers. Then he was escorted up the graveyard by another rifle company. One rifle company paid tribute to him and the other escorted the casket to the cemetery. That was, we did some heart to mind operations out to some of the local villages.

Describe a heart and mind operation.

27:30 We'd go into rural parts of the country. Never aggressively, but just to let them know that we were there to protect their country and show the Australian flag. Later on we did some other things as far as hearts and minds, but I'll get on that later on. This was just to let the local people know the Australians were there to help them

28:00 through this difficult time of confrontation as we had during the Second World War. Some of our units had been Second World War Australian units and done some very, very brave things on the Malay Peninsula. Some of them come to mind for me now and they were pointed out to us how, I can't remember what machine gun battalion was the one bridge crossing. A particular Australian unit stayed

28:30 there and sacrificed a whole unit to try and stop the Japanese who were around them and annihilated. The people towards us as Australians were pretty good, the local people. You had to watch out for the communist Chinese a bit, but the local Malay were OK. They were no problem. They were quite respectful towards us. We had to then start realising we couldn't treat

29:00 them the same way some other nationalities had treated these people. Mainly the British. I'm not a royalist and I'm also not a republican. I'm an Australian. We tried to treat them as best we could. And we looked after people.

What did you

29:30 **experience of the local food and wildlife?**

Some pretty colourful things. We did some terrible things. We used to go to these satay bars and they'd have the sticks with the satays on. Each stick was a different colour. So a white stick as 20 cents, a red stick was 50 cents, a yellow stick was a dollar or whatever. So we'd go and help yourself

30:00 from the satay bar. The way to do things was to put the stick on the side plate when you'd finished eating the satay. We found out we could break these sticks up and stick them in our pockets and only pay for a couple. That's just Australians I think. I think it used to P the locals off a bit. They soon woke up to our little tricks and would count the sticks before they put them down. Nothing real bad, but I suppose we shouldn't have done it.

30:30 Everything was a challenge to a young soldier. We went along with these challenges. A couple of our guys had married local girls. I don't think the army liked it and I don't think the local senior citizens like it, but it happened on a couple of occasions. When you mix with them closely these were the Royal Malays were Moslems and you've gotta be

31:00 just watch your Ps and Qs a bit. We found out what to say and what not to say after a while. Treat them with respect and they'll treat you with respect. So that's all it comes down to. You had the radicals. You'd go into some of the villages and there'd be some radical people there. They'd look at us as British as well, you see, so they had this big hate thing on for the British. Most the time they didn't affect us, but sometimes some of the radicals, but there's

31:30 radicals in our people as well. So just adjust to it.

Can you describe the air wing in more detail?

We were allotted, I'm pretty sure it was three helicopters. Before this unit you saw, when you were in Australia, you saw helicopters, but they weren't

32:00 attached to the unit. This time three helicopters, plus it was crew and backup, mechanics, the whole lot, became part of the actual battalion. They were there for evacuation, for the battalion commander to observe forward operations and control. Because you remember some of the radio sets we had in those days weren't as good as the ones we had later in Vietnam where they

32:30 were only line of sight radios. So if you had a feature in between you, you lost communication. At times we had to have re-broadcast stations, which I'll explain when we talk about in Borneo. They were there to take water and food in and out, resupply us in the field with what they could carry. They're not very big aircraft. They were handy

33:00 within the battalion. Mainly we relied on them for food and water and evacuation of wounded soldiers if it occurred.

What contact did you have with enemy?

In Malaysia I personally had no contact with the enemy. Wasn't until we went to Borneo that we had contact to talk about. Before that it was only a sweep on a

33:30 beach and caught three insurgents one night. That was another rifle company that did that. I got out of all that.

In what way did you become aware the move to Borneo was on?

We'd been told well in advance that we were leaving for Borneo. That would be a 6 month operation to act as a police force within Borneo in the

34:00 Sarawak area to control the border crossings. We'd never been told anything about some of the other things we had to do when we did get there, which were then under top secret.

Who was going to Borneo?

The whole battalion went. We left from different places at different times.

34:30 I went on the SS Albee [?] from Port Dixon on Anzac Day 1966. That's when they put a little nametag in your hat and I remember walking down the wharf and I see this rust bucket of a ship. "Hell, is it gonna make it to Borneo?" It did. I thought "This is Anzac Day and I'm getting on a ship to go

35:00 to fight." I had a bit of a funny feeling. It took us, SS Albee, I think it did about 9 knots. It was a pretty old Second World War leftover type of machinery and we had minesweepers doing zigzags across our bow and stern. Two minesweepers escorted us all the way.

- 35:30 They were zigzagging in front and behind us because it was a troopship. They were always in view as they did this zigzag search in front and behind us in case of enemy. We never saw anything. We arrived in, I think it was about three days to get there on the ship. When we got there we landed in Kuching. Never seen a tidal river before I got to Kuching and when we
- 36:00 pulled up in the afternoon the [LSL: landing ships logistics] Sir Lancelot went past us when we were going up the Kuching River. That was a British unit that we were taking part of their replacement. We were replacing their positions on their fire support bases up on the border. I'll never forget; they all stood to attention on the deck, all the British, and they played one of those sentimental English military
- 36:30 tunes with their band on the flight deck as they went past. I can't remember which song it was now, but it was one of those sentimental military things. Then we landed at Kuching. When we tied up the boat was right up in the air. When we woke up the next morning we had to walk up the gangplank in stead of down it. We disembarked the next morning after arriving there.
- 37:00 They took us in this great big shed. We all had our weapons with us and our bolts in our weapons. "This is getting fair dinkum." They issued us with live ammunition and put the magazine on the weapon and cocked the weapon. So you've got a live round up the spout. This was all new. Then they issued us with hand grenades to stick in our webbing. We'd never carried live
- 37:30 hand grenades before. So we had hand grenades and flares and some of the smoke grenades and other stuff to go along with it. The seats on the truck weren't facing inwards, they were facing outwards. We had to watch our arc as we travelled out of Kuching harbour. "Hello, this is the real McCoy. You're in for it now, Alley." We then shifted into our company
- 38:00 position, which was a fire support base at Gombang, which was a spur line, if you understand what a spur line is, it's like a ridge and a spur runs down one side and the fire support base was right on the ridgeline, which was a very easy position to defend. I think the border was about 2,000
- 38:30 meters away roughly. A bit over 2 kilometres away was the border. We saw the border from our position.

What happened to your wives?

They stayed in Malaya where they were safe. So they were there for 6 months when we were over in Borneo for 6 months. Once we arrived there we were then issued with the new super duper rifle that we'd heard about.

- 39:00 We were issued with an Armalite. The first time we'd seen the Armalite. The super duper rifle. Except ours was the AR15, not the M16. Ours was the AR15 which was the user trial model of the then to be used M16 in Vietnam. Sometime down the track we had some contact with some
- 39:30 Indonesians. With our user trial AR15s the Indonesians had the super duper brand new M16.

Tape 4

- 00:39 **Tell us about the Armalite AR15 you were issued with.**

The AR15 had a prong type flash illuminator. It had no bolt assist, which means when you cocked the weapon you really didn't know whether the round had gone all the way into the breach, which

- 01:00 once you fired it, it can either blow back or double feed in the magazine. When the M16 came out it had a bolt assist, which meant when you first cocked the weapon you could hit the bolt assist and it would throw the round all the way into the breach and it was properly loaded and locked. It would fire from the locked position, which was a lot safer. They also changed the flash illuminator from the prong,

- 01:30 which got caught as you went through the jungle, to a round cylindrical type illuminator. They changed the rifling. The round and the weapon was much the same except for those couple of things, which were all important especially if you were in the field using them. You knew at least the first round had gone all the way into the breach. After that it would reload itself and would reload all the way we would hope.

- 02:00 **The AR15 was a different weapon to what you'd been used to.**

I had an OMC, which was made in 1941, so it was better than what I had. They were very unreliable, Owens. If you had contact with enemy it would be just as good throwing the OMC as trying to fire them. They were OK for the day, but their day was outlived.

- 02:30 They should have been retired well before that. When we went to Borneo we got the AR15.

How light was it?

I couldn't remember the weight now, but it's not very heavy. The weapons they use today, like this Steyr. It's as heavy as the Steyr. I should know the weight of it, but I can't remember now. It was quite a lightweight weapon. There were so many bad things

03:00 said about it and so many good things. If you looked after the weapon it'd look after you. Maintenance on the weapon. Easy springs magazines, keep the weapon clean. If you didn't things would happen, which we found out later on with the way the VC [Vietcong] handled their weapons and looked after them.

You moved into a fire

03:30 **support place?**

A fire support base at Gombang. Each rifle company was allotted a forward fire support base. We were in Gombang. Then there were two other spread across the line of the border. I can't remember their names now. Then there was one company kept in reserve at Bau, battalion headquarters

04:00 area. So we had three forward positions and one rear position. From there we did operations under Operation Claret, which even to this day when I know that some guys are claiming compensation, the British war office can't find records of Claret. However our government can now after all these year. 'Cos we're all under

04:30 Secrecy Act at the time. There were some guys that had mouthed off from 3 Battalion about what they'd done to Indonesians and they'd made a statement to the press in Singapore and they were sent straight back to Australia. I don't know what happened to them, but we were told this was all covert and it was, and not to open our mouths. I can say what I like now because the secrecy act time is up. There's quite a good book written about it, which is called, Our

05:00 Secret War, Operation Claret. It's a good bit of reading. I think some of these books should be compulsory. I've got a copy that I refer back to from time to time. That explains 4 Battalion's role within the Operation Claret where we did patrols onto the Indonesian territory. We actually went onto the Indonesian territory and ambushed and killed on their side of the border, which

05:30 we weren't supposed to do, but we did do. A part of the challenge. You felt good when you went over to their side.

Lay out the ground of Operation Claret.

You've got the Cambrai Ridge, which becomes actually part of the border. As far as my rifle company went, which was A

06:00 company, we were looking straight at the Cambrai Ridge. All our patrols were normally 7 to 14 days platoon patrols where you'd go up on the Cambrai Ridge and lay ambushes, trying to get the infiltrators coming across the border. From time to time you would go and lay ambushes where you weren't supposed to lay ambushes, you'd go across the border and lay ambushes. Some of the other rifle companies had

06:30 quite successful operations. By the way successful, I mean they had contact and had killed enemy. We'd also been introduced to the brand new super weapon, the Claymore. How they introduced us to the Claymore was we went out on ambush. The helicopter came out and dropped into these Claymore mines with an instruction. That was our first introduction to a Claymore, which

07:00 we did perfect and found out how to use them and they were very successful as a defensive weapon in Vietnam mainly. We never had a need to use them, but we found out how good they were later on. We were first introduced to them being issued to us from a helicopter with an instruction pamphlet. So you learned how to use them pretty well. It had a sign on it, "This way towards enemy," so that was our

07:30 introduction to this 500 Bulgarian with a pound and a quarter of PE [plastic explosive].

What was the knack of handling a Claymore mine?

Sighting them in a safe position and to use the weapon to its full advantage, which was to cut off any enemy coming in to help anyone you'd caught in the killing zone in your ambush. To use as a cut-off. So you could fire them

08:00 and then withdraw. They had a lot of good uses and we used them very successfully in Vietnam. If you call killing people successful they were successful.

What was the main objective of Operation Claret?

Just to stop the Indonesians infiltrating across the border into Sarawak, which was part of Malaysia. These operations went right through into Brunei,

08:30 the whole lot, but we weren't involved in them, we were only involved in Sarawak itself. We had Australian engineers, we had Australian artillery, which was placed in different places. We had British artillery that supported us. I'm glad they were there on one particular day because they took the heat off us. Where I was saying before how we had these older type radios which were only line of

09:00 sight. On the Cambrai Ridge was a trig [trigonometry] point. This trig point was used as a re-broadcast station. So we'd go up there a section at a time, only a section, up on our own, and stay up there usually

7 to 10 days and then get changed over. At the bottom of this trig point, which was a big mountain on the Cambrai Ridge, was the Gombang village. We'd go up there. We'd take

09:30 extra rations with us. When we got to Gombang village we'd get the locals to carry our packs up and we'd give them rations. They were quite pleased to do that, so we'd do a couple of sandbags of extra rations and give them to these guys and they'd pull our gear up the top. Our packs, not our weapons. We kept our weapons in our hands. Those guys were very pro-Australian.

10:00 Later on we had a politician destroy all that.

In what way was language a problem with the locals?

We had with us some Iban Dyaks [local people] that we used as scouts. We issued them with shotguns. There was one per platoon. After a while, your sign language, you could communicate with them. You come up and show them your pack, tell them where you're going and show them

10:30 the bag full of rations. They knew what it was all about. So they'd pull our packs up. That's when we found out how good the British gunners were. We were up there doing the re-broadcast and we were laying around, shirts off. It was only our section. It was only our section commander with us. This is Tommy Burke. He was a pretty hard case. We had no one else to worry about so we'd set pickets out and secure our position.

11:00 We didn't just lay in the sun. Well, you couldn't 'cos the trees were too high. This particular day we were sitting around having a brew and a smoke. Next thing you can hear these rounds coming in. "Shhhh, shhhh, boom, boom." They're blowing up in the trees above us. Tree burst. There's shrapnel flying everywhere. I went over to the CP [command post] where we were holding the radio sets to do the re-broadcast and I say to Tom "Hey Burke, some bastards are trying to shoot at us." He

11:30 said, "Bullshit." He came out from the CP, which was half underground. Came out and there's bits of tree flying everywhere. So we got through to the guns, which the British had three 155s at a place called Pajuro. We'd never seen medium artillery before. The Australian army didn't even have

12:00 any medium artillery. Next thing these guns fired from Pajuro at the gun that was firing on us, which was on the other side of the border. They used a very old technique called a sound-ranger, which is a series of microphones put out and then there's a primary when the round's fired from the artillery piece and a secondary as it's hitting the ground. They'd take a bearing on the sound-ranger,

12:30 which was an old Second World War type material. These three guns at Pajuro opened up with their 155s. The first round was within 50 meters of the enemy gun, which isn't bad considering how far. They were firing over a mountain range to the other side. After that we were glad they were there because this gun was firing on us at the re-broadcast, trying to knock us out because at the same time

13:00 there was a contact on. The Indonesians had pulled this Howitzer, American I might add, to pieces and carried it in through the jungle for two months, set it up to fire on the re-broadcast station. As it happened, the British first round was in 50 meters and they ran away and left the gun. We went across and blew it later on. The local villagers had even used as

13:30 labour by the Indonesians. Forced labour to carry this gun and all its weaponry in. It had taken them something like 2 months. It only fired about 10 rounds and then it was put out of action. They were pretty old 155s, I'm glad they were there 'cos we may not have got out of there. That was the closest I came to an actual

14:00 combat situation in Borneo although you were on patrol and you worked. There was always that chance of having contact. Some of the other rifle companies had a lot more contact. That was my whole lot, except for the patrolling and ambushing, which I suppose in one way we were glad they were never initiated 'cos it would have been a bad situation.

What had been your view of the Brits up until

14:30 **that moment?**

We didn't really mix that well with them. When we mixed with them in the boozers there was a sort of a; there were the Australians, Kiwis and the Brits. So if the Australians were fighting the Brits, the Kiwis would have joined the Australians. If the Kiwis were fighting the Brits, the Australians would join the Kiwis. We were always fighting the poor Poms.

15:00 If the Australians and Kiwis fought, everyone stood back and let them bash into one another. That was just in the boozers. A couple of fights. I suppose before that we didn't, they were fairly professional and we hadn't had that much to do with them. But after seeing their gunnery, boy, they were OK. Or else we may not have got out of there, 'cos they were dropping shell bursts all through the area. There was great hunks of trees.

15:30 Tree shrapnel is worst than anything else because splinters were flying through the air and would just go straight through me. They went through our hoochies [tents]. Tore our hootchies to pieces. I was quite happy with the Brits, yeah.

What's a hootchie?

Your tent. Shrapnel flew through and ripped them to pieces 'cos we had bunkers there, fighting pits.

- 16:00 Because it was wet season they were full of water and beetles and bugs and snakes. When those rounds were going off I didn't give a damn about them snakes. I didn't care how wet it got, it was better than getting a hole. So we started to appreciate them there. Afterwards, when we had some injuries and sicknesses, Borneo was rife with bad tropical diseases, I caught one and
- 16:30 nearly died, I understood then that their aircraft would come in and get you out. Our aircraft weren't capable of getting up to the altitude with their petrol engines. The small Bell Sioux. They couldn't get in. Even some of the large English aircraft couldn't. Talking about being on this re-broadcast station, we'd done this several times. This was the only time we were fired on.
- 17:00 We were up there one day and we're listening out for the other companies and what information they want you to re-broadcast for them. We're re-broadcasting a particular message and the next thing you get a crackle comes on the radio. We were up fairly high. It was an American aircraft, told us to get off the air. He said "'Cos we're fighting a real war over here." The transmission went something like that. He said
- 17:30 whatever his call sign was at his base. He said "I'm being shot at." The other radio you could just pick him up. "How do you know you're being shot at?" "'Cos I've got a hole in my windscreen." Then we were still broadcasting and this American pilot came in and said, "You guys get off this frequency. We're fighting a real war over here." Sometime later I found out how real that war was. That's how that re-broadcast station was 'cos it was so high. Some of the mountains
- 18:00 we did operations on in Borneo would take you more than one day to climb to the top. On several occasions they took us two days to climb from the flooded lands, like rice paddy land, to the top. One position we climbed half way and it became dark and it was unsafe to go any further. We had to tie ourselves up with toggger ropes. Togger ropes,
- 18:30 each soldier carried a toggger rope, which we can use to climb things or tie things up or help people be evacuated. We had to tie ourselves up to a tree so we wouldn't roll down the hill at night. That's how tall some of them, they take 2 days to get to the top. By the time you got to the top you never had any water left. So then you had always this thing with water. That went right through Borneo and after two trips
- 19:00 to Vietnam you never had enough water. That's why some guys have got bad medical problems now because of lack of water. When we got to the top there's no water up there. Plenty of water down the flatland. You'd hope it would rain so on your hootchie you could put your mugs out and catch water for your water bottle. If it rained you got wet, but you got water. So we didn't mind getting wet 'cos we got water.
- 19:30 Some of the British aircraft couldn't come in at the height we were. That's where the Indonesians, the same as the Vietcong, would use natural features as their navigation aids. So they weren't navigating like us with a compass and a map, they navigate with the natural lay of the land. They use the natural features as navigation aids.
- 20:00 Up on the top of the Cambrai Ridge it was like a three lane highway. You find abandoned camps. Different stories about different people finding people up there. I can only talk about what I saw and knew. I never saw some of the things that are supposed to have happened to different people. So I can't make any comment on that. We did some operations within
- 20:30 the flat areas of Borneo as well. We had a report that a large unit had crossed the border and we set up a coordinate search and a battalion sweep. My company was actually the coordinate part of it. We were cordoned up on a swap with a village about 2,000 meters away. The only water we had was the water from the swamp.
- 21:00 So we had to dig sea poles. We used all this stuff that's issued us like, Mills filter, bags and the one blue tablet and two white tablets. One guy came down with amoebic dysentery and died. Two more came down with amoebic dysentery and were sent straight to far off British military hospital in Singapore. I got amoebic dysentery and got sent to a field hospital in Bau. If I ever wanted to die, when I had
- 21:30 amoebic dysentery, I thought "Hey, if there's someone out there, take me, 'cos I'm yours." Everything just went from you. From both ends. Three ends at once. You were being sick. Everything was coming from you. I had amoebic dysentery for, I was in hospital for 11 days. 9 days of that I was on starvation diet trying to get it out of my system. I was ill. As
- 22:00 far as my health goes I have problems now relating to that amoebic dysentery. There are a lot of other ex soldiers that are having just as much problems due to this lack of water, dirty water and some of these exotic diseases that was in the jungle. You'd see jungle rats as big as domestic cats. It was really rife. It was unfortunate that we lost blokes through medical problems, which you thought, "These days..."
- 22:30 Well, it's a fair while ago now I suppose, was a pity to lose soldiers that way.

What were your first symptoms of it?

I didn't know, we were diagnosed, but your bowel movements were just non existent. There was just continuous bowel movement and vomiting. You start to fibrillate your heart, you're hot and cold, you just felt really

23:00 bad. I can remember sitting in the toilet and had a shower running on me at the same time. Everything was just coming from everywhere. I thought, "God, let me die." But I didn't at the end. He reckoned I hadn't suffered enough. So the disease side and accident side of the Borneo campaign, it should have been

23:30 managed better I suppose, medically. But then again, what did we have at the time? Not like we've got now. Malaria was rife. Skin diseases, prickly heat, dermatitis, jungle ulcer 'cos you were wet all the time. You start to get ulcers in your feet and they went straight through to the bone. It was more of a health problem in Borneo than what it was an Indonesian problem. The army wasn't geared up for this. I can just imagine

24:00 how them poor buggers, the 2,000 that died in that death march in Borneo, they had nothing and they didn't even have any food. So I bet they died a hellish death. Some people that happened.

After 9 days of throwing up, how weak were you?

I looked like a Biafran. You wouldn't think it now, but I was just skin and bone. I wasn't very strong at all. Then I came

24:30 down with some skin disease as well. What killed some of the guys that got the anaemic dysentery was they got pneumonia and unfortunately they died. We had one guy that took his own life cleaning his rifle.

25:00 Mental problems with soldiers. That's when you started to observe some of these mental problems. We had been instilled into us prior to all this, through the army, that if you had a mental problem or showed some hesitance in combat or that you were scared there was something wrong with you. Well, I believed that at the time. I don't believe that anymore. Unfortunately

25:30 this was brainwashed into us, especially later when we were junior and senior NCOs. A weakness, mental problems, or breakdown was generally that you were a weak person. Well, I don't believe that anymore because I've seen some very strong people also strained under the continuous strain and have not been able to cope.

They guy that suicided, was he from your unit?

No. He was

26:00 from 4 Battalion, but not from my own company. He was in another sub unit.

What skin problems did you get?

I ended up with a couple of bad bouts of what they called prickly heat. You can get it here in Queensland because it's in the tropics. I had prickly heat that bad that I couldn't put a pack on my back. So I had to go and have an operation. I can tell you some

26:30 funny stories about that. There was three of us got prickly heat all at the same time. Myself, Gary Hall, he went on to become a sergeant after two tours to Vietnam with Max, a guy called Fred Roberts, a warrant officer. We were three of the terrors I suppose. It was Fred, Gary and myself. When we were in Borneo we got issued with a rum ration.

27:00 So you got this demijohn of rum, which is an earthenware container with wicker around it. It was a platoon sergeant's job to hand this out to the section commander in a water bottle so he could have a bit of rum and tea or coffee at night. This was quite legal. It was issued by the army. Our platoon sergeant was a funny guy. I won't mention his name, but he

27:30 was a funny guy. He was trying to score one of these demijohns for himself to take back to Malaya when all the conflict was over. Over the couple of months he'd stored up a full demijohn, still with the wax top on it. The whole platoon goes out on patrol for 7 days and leaves Gary, Fred and myself behind to man the main machine gun picket. We were gonna sleep and eat up there.

28:00 We found this demijohn that our platoon sergeant had put aside for his own use back in Malaya. So between the three of us we knocked this demijohn off in 7 days. When he came back he found it empty. So he pulled the three of us up and said, "One of you people, or all of you, have stolen my rum and there's gonna be trouble." By this time we found, even though

28:30 we were private soldiers we worked out what was right and wrong and what you could and couldn't say. So Freddie said to this platoon sergeant, "Sergeant, who's demijohn of rum was that? You mean the platoon's demijohn of rum, don't you sergeant?" "Oh. Piss off and get out of my sight the three of you." So the three of us drank what the rest of them didn't

29:00 get, but it was better than him getting it. So funny things like that went on.

Then the three of you got prickly heat?

That's when we had prickly heat and didn't go out on patrol. We timed that quite well, the three of us. While they were out in the bush for 10 days we were knocking the demijohn of rum off. We slept very well too.

What was the remedy for prickly heat?

Calamine lotion. That was it.

29:30 That's all they could to, 'cos some of the guys had jungle ulcers that big you could stick your fingers in. We had rats in the bunker position at Gombang that would eat the socks off your feet. We had different ways of destroying rats that I'd rather not talk about. There were some horrific ways we had of killing rats. Burning them. Trapping them.

30:00 All different ways. There was poison and traps, but like I said, more people were injured permanently and suffered death through the jungle conditions and not so much our own hygiene, because there were no facilities for hygiene. It was just the tropic diseases were in that area.

How was the weather generally?

30:30 While we were there from the April through to October or something, we went through the wet season, but it was very humid, very hot, but after a while you got used to it. If you could keep in the jungle you keep in the jungle. If you got out in the open it was really burning hot. You try and keep under the canopy

31:00 as much as you could. From there we carried out some hearts and minds campaigns into the local villages from Gombang and I remember one time a very colourful sergeant, his name was Harry Bush. He was an ex Korean War soldier. He took us on one of these hearts and minds campaigns which was made up of composite groups from each

31:30 rifle platoon. We went in the Gombang village and it happened to be a day when they were having a sort of internal display memorial type day. Each family group had a sort of stall set up with an old Japanese rifle or an old Spanish sword. The family heritage on a stall. They had

32:00 Japanese shrunken heads hung up where they'd shrunk the Japanese soldiers' heads. It was a big festival. Each family group each had their stall set up telling their history. They were very proud. I've got a photograph somewhere of an Iban holding a Japanese shrunken head by its hair. They took us into the village itself and we were

32:30 supposed to do a hearts and minds and we took a medical team with us. That was to carry out any medical situations that a medic could handle where someone had cut themselves or had an infection and those things. We went into the head man's house. The head man's house is on stilts. Underneath the stilts are his pigs and.

33:00 his poultry. When they do their number ones and twos it's up on top of the stilts. The number ones and twos go down and the pigs eat it. Well, this is a bit rough, but that's how they live. I'm not gonna eat pork anyhow. He come out with this local wine they were making. Apparently they make it through pulping up banana into a large

33:30 bamboo that's had the middle burnt out of it and it ferments through the bottom and comes out through a drip. They had some of this stuff made up. I can't remember what it was called now, they had a name for it. They served it to us in not quite half cup fulls in little earthenware cups. Being a big Australian I threw it straight down and they said "No, no, no."

34:00 "Let's have another one." "No, no." Well, after about 4 of these we were all that drunk that we had to unload our rifles to make them safe, take a round out of the breach to make them safe to get back to Gombang, 'cos we couldn't hardly walk after this local made banana wine. Now I know why he went "No, no, no." So that was some of the experiences there. You could see the local women walking around

34:30 showing their breasts with their sarong. As soon as they saw us they would cover themselves. That was told that was for our benefit, not theirs. That was the way we liked. I didn't mind. They were taking that as they weren't ashamed or weren't scared of us, but it was a way of showing respect to us. 'Cos at this time we got to know some of the local people.

35:00 Like you said before, "How did we communicate?" Well, after a while living with these people you seemed to communicate quite well. The local scouts would listen to Radio Australia. This was when Radio Australia was allowed to broadcast overseas in something like 26 different languages. We had a guy called Lionel Murphy destroy all that. Unfortunately. I thought I'd better get that one in.

35:30 These people were getting the news of Australia and the world, not like the Malay or Indonesian news that was edited, they were getting news without editing. They'd always tell you when they were listening to Radio Australia in their own language. This helped us because they would help us. I suppose it was Australia's way

36:00 of putting our own radio propaganda into these remote areas, but we were getting rewards with information from these people. That was good information and good intelligence via Radio Australia.

How reliable was the intelligence?

Good. If they saw any movement, knew or heard anything, they'd come straight and tell us. They'd send a runner to tell us. They were all well,

36:30 I don't remember them ever being wrong, but it might have been a day late when you got there, but you could see where movement had been. This was a pity that it was ever destroyed later on when I went on to touch on intelligence duties later on in my army career. It was only then that I found out how important Radio Australia broadcasting in those different languages was to our security

37:00 until it was destroyed.

Can you tell us more about the Iban tracker?

They were a very proud type of person. In Sarawak you've got the Ibans, the Sea Dayak and the Land Dayak. So the Sea Dayak lives near the sea

37:30 or on floating platforms, and then the Land Dayak. We had an Iban tracker with us. He was real keen to get out and get stuck about it. I actually had to hold him back sometimes. He had a pump-action Browning shotgun and he was dying to use it on some Indonesians. We had to watch him. He was attached to us and he was getting paid money. You can never always carry all

38:00 your rations. If you went out for 10 days and you had three meals per day, that's 30 packs of rations. So there's no way you can put it on your pack. It's impossible. So you had to break them down to the things you like, the lightest. During the whole of the operation of Borneo was a user trial

38:30 time for stuff to be used in Vietnam. You started to get dehydrated rations and all this. Dehydrated rations were great if you had the water. With this Iban we would give him the rations that we couldn't carry. He'd pack them into a tea chest, big box, when he'd go back to his village, when we come back from patrol he'd be given a couple of days off to go back to his village. He'd be a real

39:00 big man going back there with money and all these rations. Packets of tea and coffee and tins of biscuits and packets of chocolate and sugar, salt. He was a real big man. He'd be really appreciated within his village. He would stand very high within his group of people.

Tape 5

00:40 After those operations and those hearts and minds we went back up to the re-broadcast station for another trip with my section. While we were up there we got a radio message to return to Gombang. That the company had withdrawn from Gombang and that the Ghurkhas,

01:00 I think it was the 27th Rifles or something like that, had taken over our position and when we were moving back into Gombang to be very careful because they had their sentries out. So it wasn't our sentries that would be out knowing we're gonna be coming back, it was these Ghurkhas. So we left the re-broadcast station, packed it all up, packed all the equipment back up, the radios, and started to head back towards Gombang fire support base. So we're trundling along there carrying out

01:30 a search and keeping alert as we're moving into the area. About 100 meters short of the fire support base, I've heard all these stories about these Ghurkhas how they jump out from a tree and cut your throat with their kukri [sword]. I'm thinking to myself, "Hang on, I don't want my throat cut by one of these Ghurkhas sneaking up on them", 'cos we were moving silently. So I started to whistle. Whistling as I'm going along. Tommy

02:00 Burke picks up a stone or something and throws it at me and says, "What are you making a noise for you bloody idiot?" I said "Hey, Tom. I'm getting near that sentry position and I wanna let them know that we're coming." So next thing this Ghurkha stands up and gives us a wave. That was my way of going back in that area and let them know we were coming. So we packed the rest of our equipment that most of it had already been gone. We got on an aircraft and went

02:30 back to Bau. At Bau was the rear echelon area where we had a lake, which was an old goldmine. We set up a base there which we did patrols from as well. Plus we did some of these hearts and minds campaigns. One that I'll always remember was that we went and did a hearts and minds on an ethnic Chinese village. Where we'd been up

03:00 with the native people and being welcomed and being shown a lot of courtesy and they were happy to see us, when we came into this communist Chinese village it was a whole different situation. With us we had some Ghurkha soldiers. We were a section of Ghurkhas and a section of Australian medical team. We had a doctor too that time. All these Chinese had gone back into their huts and locked the doors and wouldn't let us in. We were told

- 03:30 this could be a fairly tricky area to be playing around in. We didn't wanna upset these people any more than we had to. It didn't seem to bother the Ghurkhas. They just went and kicked the doors down and dragged them out. So we didn't have to get involved with that sort of thing with the local people. The Ghurkhas did it for us. That was getting towards the end of our 6 months and we then spent a little bit more time in Bau at the rear echelon and we started to move back
- 04:00 via the Sir Lancelot, which was a British troopship. This is one of these ships you could land frontwards or backwards onto a beach and roll off. Apparently, this same ship that was Sir Lancelot, [LSL] Sir Galahad and Sir [Geraint] something else, one of these was hit by an intercept missile during the Falklands War. All the troop deck is all below the waterline. There's a
- 04:30 roll off and roll off. We're on this ship. I'm thinking to myself, "If this ever got hit this would be a death trap down here." Everything was lined with laminex. So everything, when the troops needed they could come in with a hose and hose it down. It was all lined with laminex. I thought, "If this got hit with a heat round," which is a penetrating round, "And got inside the ship and started to
- 05:00 burn, this thing would burn to pieces with toxic smoke." That's what happened to the poor buggers in the Falklands War. The intercept missile hit one of those cruisers ships, Sir Lancelot or Sir Galahad. When those British soldiers died, there was quite a lot of them, it was, if you can ever remember seeing the TV footage with this black smoke, that was all the laminex burning under the waterline. My fears were answered when I saw that.

05:30 I felt sorry for the soldiers that perished that way.

Why were the Chinese villagers so wary of Australian soldiers?

They were not so much wary of the Australian soldiers, but of any soldiers, because these were ethnic communist Chinese. I would say they had had Malay

- 06:00 police, Malay army patrols. Some of these Asian countries their own forces are more ruthless with them than what European forces are. The Ghurkhas displayed that. They just kicked the doors down straight away. Didn't even show them any courtesy. Not that we were going to, but I think you'll find the Malaysians gave them a pretty rough time as well.

Moving forward now.

- 06:30 We went back to Malaya on this Sir Lancelot, which was much better than the ship we came over on. That took a couple of days and we got back to Malaya. We got off that boat in Singapore and then went by train from Singapore back to where they make the pewter I think it was. Selangor? One of the big railway stations.
- 07:00 Then we were trucked back to Malacca, Terendak garrison. Then we went on leave for about three weeks.

When were you debriefed from Borneo?

When we were debriefed we were debriefed in one of the fire support bases. Some of the things come back to me slowly. We were debriefed there by a British field officer, so he was either brigadier or above. He

- 07:30 debriefed us and padres had a church service. That's when the padres mentioned the guy that had died by suicide. They were quite ruthless with what they said, these padres. He was sort of a disgrace type of thing. Well, like I said, who knows when someone can't take any more? Then this British field officer addressed us. I'm pretty sure he was a brigadier,
- 08:00 but he may have been higher. He said that, "He wished his hands hadn't been tied as much as they were and couldn't use the Australian soldiers more tactically". Little did he know how tactical we had actually been during that 6 months. I don't think they knew and I don't think the Australian public knew.

During the debrief were you able to explain?

No, not to the field officer. He had the stage and

- 08:30 we were just there to listen to him and spit on the ground.

Were you able to give any comment?

No.

How did the padre explain the actions of the guy who had suicided?

He named off, I can't remember how many guys were killed. Five or seven. The books would tell me, but I can't remember all these things.

- 09:00 The guys who were killed and died from enemy action and accidents and diseases. He went through and named every one of those soldiers, but the guy that was a suicide he didn't name. He said, "Then there was the other death" or words to that effect, which we all knew what he was referring to. We thought for a religious man he was hypocritical.

How did it

09:30 impact on the morale of the unit?

The suicide? I can't say it really affected us that much. You were pretty hyped up yourself. Self survival sort of situation. Looking after yourself and your mates around you. Someone had suicided, someone had died after a while. It doesn't affect you a great deal. It does later on, but at the moment it didn't.

10:00 We were so brainwashed that anyone that did that was considered a weak link or a coward, which is wrong, but that's how we were taught to think at the time.

You said you took a couple of days leave after that.

After Borneo the battalion was stood down for three or four weeks to go on leave. Different people went to different parts of Malaya. We'd saved up a bit of money being in the jungle for 6 months. So you had

10:30 a decent holiday with your wife. I took my wife down to Singapore where we stayed for a couple of weeks and rented a car and drove around. Went to Changi, went inside Changi and had a look at where the prisoners of war had been. Looked all over the place. It was very interesting.

How long did it take to unwind from what you'd been through in Borneo?

A couple of weeks and we got back to the normal routine.

11:00 During this time, when we rejoined the battalion and got operational again, confrontation had finished with Malaya and Indonesia and you just went onto normal type barrack and unit life in another country. Much the same. Went on with normal procedures. By this time we'd started to get national servicemen in. This is

11:30 the first time we'd seen this new breed of person called national serviceman. The national servicemen came in and started reinforcing the unit through sick, wounded and dead. Also they started drawing off 4 Battalion to reinforce the units going to Vietnam. They would only take single men so the single men were being sent to 5, 6 and 7 Battalion.

12:00 No, 5, 6 and 7, I think. So I know some of the guys I knew went to 2 Battalion, some went to 7. That was the last of the regular army units in Malaya. That's when they split it all up and started sending guys back to make the nucleus of all the new battalions. Plus the other battalions were sending the nucleus for all the battalions to go to Vietnam.

12:30 By then you had already formed 5, 6, 7 and 8 and were still to form 9, which formed just some time later. So their nucleus were coming out of the last of that period's regular army units. The guys in the specialists within the support company were being sent back to Australia to help train new mortar crews, pioneer platoons,

13:00 the tracking teams. That's when I left the rifle company and went to tracker platoon because some of the dog handlers were sent back to Australia to train the dogs to go to Vietnam 'cos we had no one except these dog handlers that knew anything about dogs. So they became the nucleus of the tracker wing at Ingleburn. That was the start of the Australian army tracker unit to go to Vietnam.

13:30 The first unit that went to Vietnam didn't have dogs, 'cos we had no dogs. That's when I went to tracker platoon and went down to Kota Tinggi, which is JTC, Jungle Training Centre, and I did a visual tracking and a dog tracking course under the royal veterinary corps.

What was your previous experience with dogs?

Nothing until I went

14:00 and did that course. I've always had dogs, but as far as professional training, nothing. I went to a kennel down there which was two war dog training units. They had something like I suppose 200 dogs. So it was a pretty big setup. By the time we got there 110 Airborne Americans were in there as well. So the British weren't involved in Vietnam, were they? They were only training the dogs.

14:30 Politicians and their lies. That's the first time we met soldiers who were actually going in to Vietnam, these Americans, except the ones we'd already sent home. We were there with our dogs, American dogs and the British army dogs. It was a very interesting time. When they first went in they first thing they make you do is go to a dog autopsy.

15:00 If you can't handle that they just bundle you up and send you back to your unit. It didn't bother me. When we had got to Kota Tinggi, the royal veterinary corps, they just finished using the last of their pack horses, actually the mules, pack ponies they were. Whilst 3 Battalion was in Borneo they used the

15:30 pack ponies. By the time we got there they were all gone.

How did you handle the autopsy?

You see this CSI [Crime Scene Investigation - television show] and all this thing when they talk into sort of a recording tape machine? In my time, this is 1966, they had a checklist and the veterinary surgeon

was a major and he'd carry out the autopsy

16:00 and then he'd just say, "Liver, black spots underneath side." A clerk would write all this down. So it was much the same as you see on TV these days. Except it was hand written. He cut the top of the dog's skull and had a look at the brain. Dissected the whole dog. Took the heart out, the liver, the spleen, all the vital parts. It seemed pretty cruel to me.

16:30 Not that this dog was being cut up, but they don't euthanize the dog, they let the dog die naturally. That way they can backtrack the symptoms the dog may be carrying, which when you really work it out was what they had to do anyhow. We'd see the dogs in the kennels dying and you think, "Why don't they go and get a rifle and shoot the dog?" But then they can't trace back what killed the dog. So you've gotta let the dog die naturally to be able to trace back on the dog. It was quite interesting.

Did you perform an autopsy?

17:00 No, I just observed. That was the first day we got there, go and watch the dog autopsy. If you can't handle, there is no good being there. It was interesting I thought.

Did many men not make it through that?

Yes. All of us had all been in the army long enough not to worry about that. There was roughly about 200 dogs in that kennel. They had all sorts of dogs. Tracking dogs, IP [infantry patrol] dogs,

17:30 which are virtually what our army uses now with infantry patrol dogs or what they call GP dogs, general purpose dogs. They had guard dogs, mine dogs. The time I was there I was wrapped, because it was something in the army you could learn and grab hold of, which was to become very valuable later on, especially the visual tracking side of it.

Were you assigned a dog?

Yes. The guy that had my dog was a

18:00 guy called Bill Jones. Bill Jones had been sent back to Australia to establish the tracker wing at Ingleburn. I took his dog over. That dog's name was Rank. He was a mean, bitter dog. He didn't like Asians at all. That was because he'd been with us.

What kind of dog was Rank?

Cross bred Labrador.

Why was Labrador chosen?

At the time

18:30 all the armies were using cross bred Labradors. British army, American army. They use different dogs now. The German Shepherd is inclined to get some tropical disease where the Labrador for some reason didn't get the amount of disease as the German Shepherd got. German Shepherds would get eczema and skin disease very easy where the Labrador seemed

19:00 to stand up to it quite well.

What were you taught about caring for Rank?

You were taught all the basic care, grooming, watch for signs of illnesses, how to clean their anal glands and just like having a vehicle. You gave it a maintenance check. You learned how to maintain the dog, keep the dog healthy, exercise the dogs, the dog's diet.

19:30 We usually did what we were told. We weren't supposed to give the dogs bones, but we'd always sneak a bone in for them to chew on when no one was looking.

How were you taught to prevent illnesses associated with the jungle to happen to your dogs?

Look for ticks. How to groom the dog. How to watch for tapeworm, go and check their faeces after they'd done a business.

20:00 You poke it and see if there's any worms or worm eggs. Just the basic maintenance of the dog. After a while you got to know whether your dog was a bit off colour or just a bit seedy or whatever. It was interesting work. It was the first time in the army I'd been able to grab hold of something. I thought it was an exciting time.

What was Rank's diet?

If you were in the field it was tinned food.

20:30 The dog handler's cover man and the other guys in the section would carry a can each. Usually the dog handler and the cover man would carry most the cans. You give them a can of food. Sometimes you had dry food for them. When you were in the camp area you'd give them minced up meat with cabbage and carrot grated up and if you're lucky you pinch a few

21:00 eggs and beat a couple of eggs up. We were allowed to give them one egg a week. I'd try and pinch a few more for my dog.

When rations were tight, what did you do?

We never got into a situation where rations were very tight. You always had plenty of rations. The only thing was water. Water was always a big thing. So you had to make sure you carried enough water for the dog. You'd always give your dog a drink of water before

21:30 you had a drink of water yourself. Make sure your dog was hydrated. That was very, very important. You and I can tell one another if we want a drink of water, but he can't. You can see his signs. You look for how to see the signs. You try and do this to the best of your ability. Because we did have dogs die through heat exhaustion or dehydration. So you try to keep your water up for the dog. Make sure he got a drink of water before you did.

What signs would you look for

22:00 **for dehydration?**

If he was unsteady on his feet. If he's panting too much. Watch and see what his heart rate was. I can't remember now what it was supposed to be. You generally knew when your dog was getting close. You try and cool him down. Put him in the shade, tip water on his head.

What was Rank's temperament like?

Didn't like Asians. He didn't

22:30 very much like women, he just liked being with his soldiers. He'd go nowhere near Asians. They give off a different body scent. Near Asians he got very wary. His hackles would go up. That was his job. He was trained to be a tracker and to be alert. Didn't fancy women too much. He just liked his own guys. I look back on it now and I used to bait my team commander.

23:00 In those days we had 4 dogs per platoon. So your platoon could be split into 4 groups. So each rifle company could have a dog. Later on they only had 2 dogs per platoon. My team commander was a pretty good guy. I had a bit of a devil in me. So you always wonder out in the field, this is when we were going up near the Thai border. He'd come up and say, "Mac, where are you tying your dog up?"

23:30 I'd say, "That tree over there." He said, "So when I come to wake you up I'll come this way." So I wouldn't put the dog there, I'd put the dig over there, the way I knew he was gonna come. He didn't like Rank. So every time the team commander was coming to wake me up for picket I usually put the dog in a position where the dog would bite him. That was part of the fun. You had to do these things. I'd go on gun picket and I'd tie the dog up on

24:00 a short leash to my leg, roll over and go to sleep. I wasn't supposed to do that, but I knew no one could come near me 'cos the dog would wake me up. That was part of being a soldier. You've gotta push to the limit and see how far you can get away with things.

Rank hated Asians and that was part of his job as a tracking dog?

Well, the scent.

How do you train a dog to hate a certain race?

You

24:30 don't really train them to hate. It's his scent of us or our skin follicle scent, which they call it these days, gives off a certain odour because we eat a certain diet. The Asian eats a different diet. I can still smell to this day, I can smell Asian before I see Asian. I am a bit of a racist, yes, but I can smell Asian. It's in my brain.

25:00 The psychs tell you it's not, but I've got a funny sense. The dog was exactly the same. That person is giving off a different odour to what our people were and that odour, which was making the dog alert. I wouldn't say he hated anybody, he was just alert that there was a foreign scent around. When they do start tracking, they're tracking a scent that's different to ours.

25:30 **What does that scent smell like?**

I know in this day of political correctness you're not supposed to say the things that we used to say. I would say I could smell Nog. Nog was Asian. So I can smell Nog. I proved in Vietnam that I could smell a Nog camp. Sometimes I wish I hadn't been able to, but

26:00 it's a musty sweet smell. That's the best way I can explain it. It's a musty sweet smell. Entirely different. Because of the herbs and the things they eat. The fish, the dried fish, the rice, it gives off a different scent altogether. That's what makes the dog alert, that different scent. That's the best way I can explain it.

26:30 **How**

How does it teach the dog to track? Reward system. We will use him within our own team to track one member of the team by letting him smell a piece of his equipment, like he might drop his hat. This all goes over a period of time. This doesn't happen straight away. This takes a lot of training. You'll introduce him to a scent beside your own.

27:00 You introduce the dog to the scent and you try to put the dog on the scent without forcing him too much. Lead him in the direction of the last movement of this person you're tracking. The dog will then hopefully pick up the track, or the scent, what they call the skin follicle these days, terminology is changed. He will then scent the skin follicle. It gets fairly technical after that, but you will only do a

27:30 short run, say 50-100 meters. Then you will tell him what a good dog he is, taking his harness off him, rough him up. Some of the guys used to do some strange things to their dogs. I won't go into that. A lolly and a chocolate or a piece of meat is the normal way. You can imagine what I'm talking about I suppose. You would then increase that range and reward

28:00 the dog. You'd have your dog on what we call a pilot line, or a lead. You would then take the dog off the lead and fit the dog's harness. It's like the same as a blind person's dog. Once the dog's got his harness on, that seeing eye dog knows that he's working. The tracking harness is exactly the same. Once the harness is on that's an indication that you require the dog to do as he's trained, and he's more than happy.

28:30 He wants you to be happy so he will start tracking hopefully. Hopefully he will indicate, which is another long story. That's how you train them. Reward. There are other systems, but the reward system is the most reliable because the dog wants to keep you happy, not be scared of you. The other system is a crueller system.

How did you prepare Rank for the

29:00 **changeover of handlers?**

The other handler went off the scene and I'd come onto it and spend a few days with him. I was then taken to an area, like a large oval, where I was taught how to keep him, obedience training. Then I groomed him, fed him, this went on for a couple of weeks. Exercising the dog every morning, at night.

29:30 Rewarding the dog when he was good. It took him a couple of weeks to get used to me. Actually he bit me once, but that was my own fault. I yelled at him a bit loudly and he wasn't used to being yelled at. He starts to think that you're number 1 now, so he accepted me as the head of the pack. We got on real good. He worked real good. He was a brilliant tracker.

30:00 **How do you build that loyalty that dogs are renowned for?**

By the dog trusting you. Rewarding your dog. Sleeping with your dog. We slept together. Trouble is the dog got under the mosquito net all right, but when he got up he took the mosquito net with him. So I'd be bitten by mosquitoes. That was him. He was OK. It was a very interesting time to go through that.

30:30 And a rewarding time. When I went to JTC at Kota Tinggi, when they did the assessments of the dogs, the class included the Americans, the green jackets, the marines, the whole lot. I came second. One dog beat me and that was a royal marine dog and I can remember that dog's name. It was Buddy. Buddy beat Rank, but Buddy was a good dog.

31:00 Buddy was a real one man dog. I got to know the handler. He was a royal marine. They were stationed up in Hong Kong, but the dogs were down in Johore Bahru. I got to know him quite well. We become good drinking buddies.

How did you prepare yourself to work with a tracker dog?

I wanted to work with animals.

31:30 **What kind of...?**

Physically? You had to exercise the dogs and when you exercise the dog you exercise yourself. When you're tracking with a dog you can't run out of steam yourself and pull your dog off the track because you're puffing, because then the dog will lose interest in the scent if you're restraining him too much. You can restrain him and slow him down, but if you strain him too much he thinks, "Hang on, what does he want me to do now?"

32:00 Is he finished with this bit of business?" So you've gotta be fairly fit. We used to run 4 miles every morning and afternoon to keep up with the dogs. Then you couldn't always keep up with them because they're cunning little mongrels. Where there'd be a track in a junction or a track turned back on itself and you had to follow the track you'd have to try and wind scent sometimes and go and take a shortcut. Especially

32:30 when they got real cunning and old. So the attitude was at the time that a dog did two or three seasons and then he'd just, it's like someone's outsmarted themselves. In that situation of being in the tropics all the time, they thought 2 or 3 years was enough to work the dog. I had to leave the dog behind. The day I had to leave him behind I had to take him in the kennels and I know that dog knew.

33:00 **How old was Rank when you got him?**

He would have been about 5. I had him for a year all told. He knew he was a smart dog.

33:30 He would always try and outsmart me. We'd do some funny things together. If you made a cup of tea or coffee for yourself you had to make one for Rank otherwise he'd get a bit crappy on you. What I'd do if water was a bit tight, which it normally was, I'd make a brew for myself and I'd leave him a little bit on the bottom and put a bit of extra sugar in it. Weren't supposed to do some of these things, but your dog

34:00 sat there watching you drink a nice hot cup of tea or coffee. One day I put it back on the hexamine stove, a little portable stove, and I made it too hot for him. He just got his paw and knocked it over. "That's' too hot, so not today." He was a smart dog. He was smarter than me. He was a good tracker. Tracked for an elephant wallow once. That was an experience.

34:30 **You say he was smarter than you, how would you know that? How would he show that?**

When you live with a dog for 12 months you start to, you don't go around cocking your leg up a tree, but you start to feel as one a bit. You might be slowing down and he's still tracking and he'll turn around and look at you and say, "Come on,

35:00 catch up." Then he'll wind scent and take a shortcut through the jungle and you get torn to pieces and you see him look back and laugh at you, "Got you." You had a way of relating to the dog. That's why it was so hard when handlers had to leave the dog.

What other exercises did you take Rank through in the tracker course?

I'm going back on the philosophy of my day, which

35:30 is a long time ago. The hardest thing to track on is a bitumen road because of the oil fumes and the diesel and tyre fumes. So the easiest way to get a dog off a track is zigzag a bitumen road. He was always successful picking a track up again. He'd get the tyres and fumes through his nose,

36:00 but then he'd always be able to cast himself, which is casting where you let the dog go from left to right until he picks the track up again. He always cast himself, so he was quite good at that. Some of the dogs could never come back on a track after hitting a bitumen road, but he was quite good. One of the best I ever saw him do was through an elephant wallow. If you know what a pick wallow is like, how big a pig is, where they dig holes to do all their things, this elephant wallow

36:30 is a lot bigger and smells a lot more. He actually tracked through that on a 24 hour hold. He was quite good.

Any other exercises you'd go through together?

Well, we were ready all the time to track that dog. That dog was required and the team was required at all times to be ready to track at times. So you were always ready,

37:00 even in Malaya.

What was the team that would go out with the dog?

There was the dog handler, a vision tracker

37:30 and a cover man. The idea of the cover man was to watch the dog and the dog handler. Tracking the dog I carried a rifle, but there's not much chance of me using it. There's none. If you came into a conflict straight away. So the cover man's job was to cover the dog handler and look up the track in front of the dog for any enemy signs. He'd cover me. Then you had the vision

38:00 tracker that would travel with a small rifle group for self protection in the site of a contact. If we had a contact my orders were to secure the dog and withdraw with the dog so the people behind me, if I'm still alive, could fire over my head and get me cleared and the dog cleared of the area. It was very important to get the dog out of the area as soon as you could. Then you had a radio operator and a team commander and a team 2IC. So you were

38:30 in smaller groups. You could cut down to 4 teams in those days. I don't know how they operate today 'cos they use different dogs now. They use these Belgian Malamutes. Different procedures I suppose.

How do you prepare the dog not to let loose when he hears gun shots?

You do gun shy tests with the dogs. This was all done with our dogs at Kota Tinggi, you'd have a

39:00 hand gun with blank ammunition and fired near the dog to see his reaction. If he was prepared to track after that and you'd fire blanks out of the rifles if he was getting near a pursuit area, normally the dog would come straight back to you and sit alongside you. There was no problems there. He was on a lead all the time. When he's tracking he's on a pilot line. So you've

39:30 got control of the dog so he doesn't get away from you. It's like humans. Each dog had his own peculiar way of reacting to different situations. There was no copy book situation or remedy or procedure. It was

just you reading the dog and being quick enough to read the dog.

How did Rank respond to guns firing?

He had no problems. He'd come back and sit alongside me. He'd come straight back.

- 40:00 He'd indicate quite well. He'd sit and put his nose right up. Each dog indicated in a different way. There's no set rule. It's the handler's job to watch the dog for the indication that the scent cycle has got thicker and stronger. There's different terminology they use now. They call it the skin follicle, which is the same thing.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **At the end of your Malaya tour you had to leave Rank behind. How did you cope with that?**

That was very difficult in the sense that I knew I was never gonna see the dog again and I'm sure that dog knew that was the last time he was gonna see me, because he wouldn't eat his tea. He jumped up at the kennel and was howling. In those days it was un-soldierly to cry.

- 01:00 I had to walk away and hear my dog crying and jumping up at the gate in the kennel. I thought, "I won't look back." I kept walking and next thing there were tears running down my eyes. I turned around and there he was and that was the last time I saw him. Except, I was very lucky in one sense, that I know where he went. As far as I know, I'm pretty sure I was right, he was going to be retired to the American Embassy in Singapore. So he was a dog;

- 01:30 who couldn't think of a better place to retire than the American Embassy in Singapore as a pet? Unfortunately some of the other handlers didn't know what happened to their dog. That was the last time I saw him. Then we got ready to move back to Australia.

Was there a way for you to follow up what happened to Rank after?

Not really. After we left Malaya and came back to Australia

- 02:00 things were flat out here getting all the units ready to go into or back to Vietnam. I was to join 4 Battalion at Enoggera barracks in Queensland. I went back to that tracker unit at Enoggera. I never had a dog and I went back to being a rifle man because by then the dogs were trained in Ingleburn by

- 02:30 the guys that originally had the dogs in Malaya. They'd already been trained with handlers to take them to Vietnam. While I was there in Enoggera I got an army headquarters promotion from private group leader to standard corporal group section, which was a fairly big jump. I was sent to join the new battalion 9RAR being formed in Woodside, South Australia. I marched in there in

- 03:00 January 1968. So we had another brand new unit being formed in Woodside. So three times I went overseas and three times I went from Woodside.

How did your responsibilities change?

I went from being a private soldier, didn't have to worry about much, to section commander that had the responsibility

- 03:30 of a rifle section. 9RAR had to be ready to go to Vietnam within 10 month, which I think was set that time as a record from a nothing to a combat ready battalion. They had to do their own in-corps training. The national servicemen that marched in, some of them had done corps training and some had come straight from recruit training straight to a battalion. So they formed what they

- 04:00 called Tango Company, Tango for Training. I was put on that as one of the instructors to train our own in-unit corps training. Going from a private into something like that was a fair challenge, but I think I handled it OK.

Tell me about Tango Company.

- 04:30 That was when we did our own in-corps training and I become one of the instructors. Most the instructors on it were guys that had come down from 4 Battalion to be promoted, which had already qualified with their time and active service and also had all their carder training and qualified. It was quite a challenge. That was the first time I got to work with national servicemen. I remember one stage I had to go up to battalion headquarters to pick up

- 05:00 a group of these people coming in. I went up there to pick them up. They come off the bus. They looked like a pretty raggy mob. I thought, "Oh, national servicemen." I was thinking all the worst things. One guy walking down the road tripping over his bag and he fell over. So I went over and picked it up off him. I said, "Give me that, I'll carry it for you." He looked at me. He said, "A corporal carrying my bag." 'Cos these guys had just come from recruit training and

- 05:30 got it pretty rough. I said, "No, I can carry it for you." He ended up being in my section after we done

Tango Company. He was my machine gunner. He never forgets it, even when I see him now. Big farmer from Western Australia. Rod McClellan. I won him over pretty early in the piece. That was pretty good in the sense that training these guys

06:00 you didn't have some of the problems you were having with some of the guys that trained corps training in other establishments because they were getting training by people who hadn't been overseas at all. Not that Borneo was any big deal, but some of these people were non-combatants at all and didn't understand any of the newer tactics or the mines we were using or even the M16 rifle. Some of these guys were

06:30 terrified of the M16 rifle 'cos they were told that if they dropped it it'd go off and fire rounds everywhere. It can't because the weapon's got a floating firing pin. The only reason a weapon with a floating firing pin can fire is if someone pulls the trigger. I had to go down to the 25 meter range and smash the butt into the butt stops 20 times to extract the rounds and not one of them went off. So having these guys fresh and being able to train them your own way was

07:00 quite an advantage. At least out of that Tango Company four of them ended up in my own section that I was to lead into conflict in South Vietnam.

How did you prepare for Vietnam in the 10 months?

We were lucky to have a very good battalion commander. His name was Ally Morrison. Later to be General Morrison.

07:30 Quite a distinguished soldier. He was the sort of guy to do it in 10 months. I don't think anyone else could have done it. We operated mainly as platoons and companies during our training because of the limited areas we could train in. So the only time we ever got together as a battalion was the embarkation and final parades and presentation of the colours. For that time

08:00 we never saw another rifle company except the one you're in, because it was flat stat training exercises, weapon familiarisation, APC [armoured personnel carrier] training, helicopter training, and it was all done at a company level. Therefore while one company was doing one form of training another company was doing another. You'd rotate around. So it was pretty well flat stick.

What sort of chopper training did you do?

How to disembark and

08:30 embark into a Huey, Iroquois aircraft. How to signal the aircraft in, call an aircraft in, call ground fire in from gun ships, tank fire, all these technical things were all pushed into a very full on 10 months to get the battalion ready to go overseas.

What preparations for the enemy did you do?

We had

09:00 guys had already come back from 7RAR. They'd done a tour in Vietnam. They came down and helped us get used to the tactics we would have to put up with from the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] and the Viet Cong. How they camouflage themselves, how they used snares and tripwires and mines. So we were lucky that these guys with 7RAR

09:30 came down. One of the guys that came down to instruct on the latest way the enemy were handling themselves in South Vietnam was Tom Burke, my original section commander. He was a sergeant then and I was a corporal. So we'd all bumped into one another again. At least he was someone that could instruct us on what to be wary of.

What

10:00 **was the view of the enemy?**

Most of us regular guys were breaking our neck to get there. I couldn't say that for the national servicemen, however in the same sense I think on all, most the national servicemen that I was lucky enough to serve with were probably better soldiers than some of the regular soldiers. I thought they were very good soldiers for what limited time they had to

10:30 prepare themselves. I have no complaints on how any of the national servicemen performed their duties in South Vietnam. A great privilege to serve with some of them. Most of them were academically a lot more learned than myself. These guys had been to universities and colleges and high school. I didn't even get to high school. So they were a lot smarter than me. They took my word for

11:00 what it was, being experiences. I could never complain about how they ever acted in combat or any other way.

What were you expecting from the Viet Cong?

I was expecting them to make things as hard as they could for us. To limit our operations, harass us. By then you'd already had your Long Tan and some other quite big battles.

11:30 Coral and Balmoral. We were getting reports back on how the enemy reacted and how they attacked in force. So we knew we were in for quite a stoush when we got there. Tet 1 [the first Tet Offensive] had already been by then, which was Christmas 1967-68. So we had a fair idea what we were up against. And that they were moving in large formation. NVA,

12:00 not VC.

What challenges did you face personally as instructor?

It was a challenge where I hope by my limited knowledge that I could possibly bring home as many guys as I was taking with me. My aim was not to get anyone killed with

12:30 what I'd learned through Malaya and Borneo. The senior officers appreciated that. They had so many guys that came into 9 Battalion that had come from 4 and other units that had returned to give them some form of depth within the battalions. It wasn't just all new soldiers. I was lucky enough to have a very good company commander. Laurie

13:00 Lewis who later became Brigadier Lewis. We all thought he was a pretty hard sort of guy. He was, he was hard, but he brought nearly all his men home, so that was another thing. It doesn't matter how hard they train you as long as you get most the guys home. Unfortunately not all of them. We did see quite a bit of contact during our first period in South Vietnam.

13:30 After our training in Australia I was picked to go on the advance party. Myself and my own forward scout, which was a national serviceman, and a few other guys, an officer and a couple of sergeants went on the advance party to go in and relieve 3RAR. We arrived in early November in South

14:00 Vietnam. Then we were attached to the same platoon that we would be in when our main body arrived. I was 8 Platoon Charlie company, so I went to 8 platoon Charlie company and carried on, even though I was a section commander, just as a private soldier within that sub-unit. So we could observe. I went on operations with them, their last several operations before 9 Battalion

14:30 main body arrived 3 weeks later. So I had a good insight before the main body got there.

Where did you go with the advance party?

We did an operation with tanks down off what they call Engineers' Road, which is a road that was cut around Nui Dat. Out from Nui Dat was probably

15:00 5 or 10 ks [kilometres]. There was a big Catholic village and we did a blocking group around this large catholic village. That night we were mortared. Nothing great. The only real bit of drama was that I had an accidental discharge. Not a chargeable one because if you had an accidental discharge, AD, it was a chargeable offence, but

15:30 being an extra number I got the job to carry the machinegun within the section I was attached to, which did bother me. I had an M60 so that was all right. As I disembarked from the APC the rounds went over the electric fan in the hatch and the electric fan shorted one of the rounds out and blew out of the link. So one big bang and all these guys are going to ground 'cos they were due to go home.

16:00 Then I had to tell them it was an AD. In actual fact it wasn't a chargeable AD, just the fact that there was a live wire hanging from the exhaust fan in the APC. They weren't real pleased about it. I went out with them for the day and the night and then came back to Nui Dat. Then we did what they call TAOR patrols, which is your Tactical Area of Responsibility. Did some TAORs with the same sub-unit.

16:30 Then we went on R in C [rest in country] with Charlie company down to Vung Tau. So we were getting leave before the main body even arrived. We got down there and had a bit of a beer and a carry on in Vung Tau. Something strange happened coming back from Vung Tau. There was my platoon commander, forward scout and myself and another

17:00 national serviceman who was a bit free with his hands. There's the four of us on this truck coming back to Nui Dat. We pull up at the main gate at Nui Dat. Coming out was a truckload of super soldiers, SAS. Each unit knows who's coming in and who's coming out so they knew 9 Battalion was coming in to relieve 3 and there's four of us on the truck with

17:30 our brown lanyards, 9RAR's lanyards were brown. One of these super soldiers yelled out, "Here's the chocolate soldiers." That wasn't a very bright thing for an SAS soldier to say. One of them punched our platoon commander in the nose. He went to sleep. With that Dave French, Tom Eaton and myself thought, "This is it, we'll

18:00 give them something to go along with." So we jumped into their truck and all the 3RAR guys we were with jumped in and there wasn't any super soldiers left in the truck. That was my first little bit of trouble I got into.

What was the punishment?

There was no punishment 'cos there was an officer involved. So I was very glad he was there and got punched in the nose. Otherwise there might have been trouble. Once there's an officer involved they

18:30 hush things up a bit. We never got called "chocolate soldiers" by the SAS again. They had found out what it was all about. Not that I've got anything against the SAS 'cos the SAS by then only had a lot of replacement soldiers coming in anyhow. So they could have been some base wallies from their own unit rather than combat soldiers. That was my

19:00 first bit of strife, but that was hushed over.

How did you feel afterwards?

I felt great in that truck of super soldiers. I only had two soldiers with me. The lieutenant didn't know because he had a badly bent nose.

What were your first impressions when you got to Vietnam?

I was quite happy to be there and do the job that I was trained to do and get on with it.

19:30 At that stage I really didn't have any fear of combat. I might add later on I did, but right then I was quite willing to get stuck into it. This is what I was trained for, this was my job. "Let's go and do it." The army brainwashes you pretty well. That's what it's all about, being conditioned and brainwashed, but that's the same with

20:00 probably every job there is. You think you're doing the right thing.

How high were you standing?

Pretty high. I thought my guys had carried themselves out real well. We got the backup from the 3RAR guys and that was a good reason to go back to the canteen and have a few beers. I think we had too many, but

20:30 that was all my youth.

Your forward scout was Tom Eaton?

Tom Eaton, yeah.

Tell us about him.

We became very close. We still see one another every year or so. He lives in Queensland. We got to know one another very well and

21:00 relied on one another. I only saw him the year before last, I went up to Queensland for the dog memorial dedication at Alexander Headlands. I called in to see him in Brisbane and I'm wearing glasses. He said, "How come you're wearing glasses? When did you start wearing glasses?" I said, "Tom, I've always worn glasses." He said, "There was me, walking in front of you for

21:30 all that time." I said, "I could see the back of you, your shape." He said, "You mongrel, I thought you could see everything in front of me." I said, "No, I've got bad eyesight." He wasn't real happy about that in a joking way. I used to have to wear my glasses to qualify on the firing range. Then I never wore them. I could see all right.

How much did that inhibit you on operations?

I got used to it. I just couldn't see a great distance.

22:00 But if you wear glasses in the jungle they get covered in wet and crap and steam. So I thought I was just as well off without them. I never wore them. I'm not gonna brag about shooting people, but I saw enough to survive. That's all I needed. Poor old Tommy never knew I wore glasses.

Tell us about your operations.

22:30 The main body arrived three weeks after the forward unit went in. Our first operation was to familiarise ourselves with the area surrounding Nui Dat, what's known as the TAOR area. We carried out one TAOR in the destroyed village of Long Tan. We went in there by APCs

23:00 at platoon strength. We hoochied up a defensive position inside what was left of Long Tan village. We'd been told to be careful up there because of what had happened there before with the big battle. One of our guys during the night fell down one of the old wells. All we could hear was this big bang and this guy screaming,

23:30 "Help me, help me." He's fallen down one of the abandoned well holes that was around the old Long Tan village. So we had to get torches, this was in Vietnam, who wants to light a torch up at night? We got torches and toggle ropes and try to get him. He's almost wedged himself halfway down this abandoned well. We didn't know what was down the bottom, whether it was booby trapped or what was in there. So we hauled him out

24:00 and his rifle was down there, but no one was gonna go down and get it and the engineers didn't go down. So all we did was stick a pound of PE down there and blow the hole up the next morning with the

rifle and all in it. That was better than going down. We weren't gonna go down there. You can replace a rifle. That was our first stint. Went and did some sweeps down around the Horseshoe area. Then down to

- 24:30 a village just short of the Horseshoe. We did a coordinate search. We moved in from the Horseshoe into the village by dark and surrounded the village. Then cordoned it all off for the interpreters, the local militia forces, to come in and search it while we secured it. Next thing there's a bang-bang-bang starts and three of these guys come running out from the
- 25:00 village firing AK47s. I was alongside another section. My section machinegun was further up. I ordered the section 2IC to open up with the M60 and shoot these three guys who were coming out, 'cos the M60 would have blasted them all away. He said, "No, I can't do it." I'm calling him all the weak mongrels in the world and he said, "But Mac, if I fire on these three guys the rounds are
- 25:30 gonna go into the village and there's women and children in there." I was so indoctrinated I really didn't think of the women and children. In hindsight he was correct in refusing to fire the machinegun because he was a young lance corporal national serviceman who didn't want the worry of firing into the village which was full of women and children. All I could see was the
- 26:00 three VC that were coming out towards us firing. We returned fire, but not with the medium machinegun. We fired back on them, but we didn't want to fire into the village. His name, I see him go fishing once every year. I say to him, "Dennis," Dennis Sigsten was, is name, "All these years I think you were right, mate." He said "What's
- 26:30 that?" "For not firing into that village 'cos we most probably would have killed women and children and I think you were right and I was wrong." It's those things that you don't think of at the time. None of us wanted to kill women and children, but sometimes things happen that are unavoidable and his decision not to fire with his machinegun was

27:00 the correct decision.

You didn't override his decision?

No, I could have, but he didn't want his machinegun to open up. I was a full corporal and he was a lance corporal, but his decision was the right decision. I think I'd been over-indoctrinated.

How cranky were you at the time?

I felt like shooting him, but I thought, "Hang on, this is our job to kill these guys." That was all I

- 27:30 was seeing was killing three VC, not thinking about where the unexpended rounds were gonna fly into whatever was behind. I would have opened up. I'm glad now I didn't.

He's disobeying an order. Was that how you

28:00 **saw it?**

Not particularly. He was in charge of that machinegun. It was his section machinegun. My machinegun was around further left, which couldn't open up. If I'd had my machinegun there in that position to fire I would have fired on the village, yes, and most probably live to regret it. I thought about it after it happened and I thought, "Hang on, he was concerned about these people

- 28:30 where I was most probably not." So I'm glad he didn't fire. At least I haven't got that on my conscience.

How often were you in a situation like that?

Not a great deal of the time. It was classified in two different areas. You had what they called "civilian

- 29:00 access area" and this was an civilian access area where you had to use the proper rules of engagement. Make sure you fired only on the enemy and only after they fired on you and they were completely identified as enemy, was in the civilian access area. Then you had what was known to us as "The free fire zone". In the free fire zone anything that moved to walk you shot. It was much better
- 29:30 to work in the free fire zone in the sense that whatever was there you could shoot than to work in the civilian access area and be set by the rules of engagement that limited the way you could react to enemy firing on you. I was always more comfortable in the free fire zone. I think most the other soldiers were in the free fire zone. Whatever moved you shot. Even
- 30:00 then sometimes it wasn't right.

How difficult was it to distinguish enemy from civilians?

Very hard in the civilian access areas. Very hard. It was most probably more dangerous there than what it was in the free fire zone. Because you weren't limited by what you could do. You didn't have to use any rules because they knew where they were allowed to go, they knew

- 30:30 where they were not allowed to go in between different times of operations. So it was much better to work in the free fire zone, although you knew you were gonna hit enemy. That was our first couple of

little operations with 9RAR there. We went back to Nui Dat when that was all cleaned up and prepared to go out on our first major operation, which was

- 31:00 up into the Hat Dich area, which was quite a hot pocket at the time. Some of the things that happened you think of some of the not so funny things. We got dropped off by truck. We left Nui Dat and went up into the Hat Dich area with APCs securing the route for us and got dropped off by truck. The company commander was doing a loc [location] scout to make sure where he is, conferring some of his DFs [defensive fire] and some of his
- 31:30 MFCs [mortar fire company] are having a look at the maps. We all sat down and had a bit of a rest on the side of the road. I was carrying two Claymores. So I took the Claymores off my back and off my back. You always got the weight off you as quick as you could. Sat down and had a smoke and a drink of water. Next thing they moved out and I grabbed my rifle and my pack and away I went into the jungle. I'd gone about 1,000
- 32:00 meters I suppose and I realised I left the two Claymores back on the side of the road. So I didn't want the company commander to find out, or the platoon commander, so I just said to the guys, "I'm going back to get something I left behind." I moved back real fast to the road. By this time I'd passed right through the rest of the company. The last bloke in the company I said, "I just dropped something on the side of the road. I'm going back to get it. I'll make some noise when I get back on you." He said, "How will I
- 32:30 find you?" It was a company going through the jungle. It was quite easy to find especially after all my tracking training. So I told him I'd find them somewhere. I found my two Claymores still sitting on the side of the road. I would have hated myself if the NVA or VC had got hold of them 'cos they had the primers and clackers and everything. So I picked them up and ran along the hill and caught up with the tail end of the company and went through and joined up with
- 33:00 my platoon again without anyone being any the wiser except the guys around me. They weren't gonna dob anyone in. I never told anyone that story. I suppose I was lucky I got them. I was lucky that I found the company again. They weren't that hard to track a company of Australian diggers [soldiers] with 85 pound on their back each. Then we moved into our area of operation within the Hat Dich area
- 33:30 and we were about to be bloodied. That particular first night we split up into platoon locations with company set up in between these three ambush positions. We set and initiated a very successful ambush. Just goes to show how things go through your mind. We're in the ambush position and we set it up with
- 34:00 Claymores as our cut-offs each side of the ambush. It was my turn to be picket so I was laying there. You can only lay on your stomach for so long when you find you've gotta move otherwise you get cramps in your legs or your knees. So I just quietly rolled around on my pack onto my back. So I'm laying on my back and I'm looking up at the stars through the canopy and everything's nice and quiet and next thing I see these
- 34:30 lights in the tree. I'm saying to myself, "Isn't that nice. Lights in the tree." And I think, "Lights in the tree. There shouldn't be any lights in the tree. There can only be one reason why there's lights in the tree, there's someone coming down the track using a light." So I quietly rolled over, grabbed my M16 and had it in my shoulder and two
- 35:00 VC couriers were coming down the track. They hit our tripwire, initiated the ambush and were both killed. It was a bit of a funny feeling. We were nearly bluffed. These people carried instantaneous grenades. One guy that was right in front of the Claymore was killed straight away with 500 ball bearings. He died straight away. The other one got a bit of the
- 35:30 small arms fire before he went to ground, plus a little bit of Claymore. They carry these instantaneous grenades with roughly a pound of plastic inside them. This grenade, when you pull the pin out, and let go of the striker lever, it goes off straight away. There's no delayed time. He'd pulled one of these out if his, this is how full of guts they are, after being mortally wounded and held it in his hand and started
- 36:00 moaning. This was the first time we'd been in an action. The adrenalin was pumping fairly well. The platoon commander made a decision that one of the sections would have to go, this was 6 o'clock in the morning, quite dark, would have to go out and bring this wounded back into our ambush area where he could be interrogated or fixed up. The section
- 36:30 was another section within the platoon. Split up, just about to stand up when his pain must have got too much for him and he let go of the instantaneous grenade, which then went off, blew the rest of him to pieces and luckily our guys weren't affected. Just shows you how close it could have been. These guys could have been out there trying to get him. So after that we made a decision amongst ourselves, ruthless as it may sound, we didn't go and retrieve
- 37:00 wounded bodies. You can work that out however you like, but there was no sense anymore in trying to retrieve a wounded body because they were booby trapping themselves. I couldn't afford to lose any men that way. That was our first bloodied. As the light came up and we went out and searched the area we got what was left of both

- 37:30 these guys and brought them back off the track and secured the track. It was quite common that if they were couriers that wherever they were going, or wherever they come from, would come looking for them, so we had to secure the area. Company moved up on us and when I went through this guy's possessions he had a photo of himself, his wife and his three children. At the time I had three children and
- 38:00 it was a bit sad that I had to kill someone that had three children, but that was warfare. That was the first time we went into battle and we were successful. They weren't, unfortunately. Then we dug some holes and buried them alongside the track. We did ambush that track again at that same area. It was quite common for them, being
- 38:30 a very family orientated people, to come back and retrieve the dead bodies. Even if it was a day or two days later. We had done this after this and been successful in the same spot three times. Ambushing people coming back to get the bodies. I think ambushing was the best way to fight it. It was safest for us. We could get killed, but without our guys getting killed. That was
- 39:00 a funny feeling. I was a regular soldier and the rest of them were national servicemen and you were supposed to show strength. I felt a bit sick, 'cos you smell the bodies burning with the phosphorous all over them. It made me a little bit ill, but I was trying not to show any weak sides. I remember opening up a tin of pork slices, stuck
- 39:30 the fork in and pulled the fork slices up and I thought, "No, I can't" and I threw them away. I couldn't eat them after that. There's these other guys, the green national servicemen, sitting there handling it better than me. So you don't know how it's gonna affect you. That was our first time in a close quarter combat. Some days later a very unfortunate thing happened.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **You were about to tell us about some instances in which you weren't so fortunate.**

After that first successful ambush, that was the first successful combat that C Company 9RAR had made. Unfortunately, several days later we were doing an advance search and destroy. That's where the three platoons

- 01:00 fan out and move independently trying to cover as much area as they can with company headquarters moving behind them. Unfortunately two platoons hit one another and opened fire on one another killing one Australian soldier. He was killed by another Australian soldier. We were withdrawn from the field
- 01:30 after that happened, which is a normal situation. Even these days any time when there's someone killed by friendly fire there has to be an investigation. We were moved from the field and back to Nui Dat while the inquiry was carried out.

How did that happen?

Happened by unfortunately two sections from two different

- 02:00 platoons that were navigating, turned and walked straight into one another. Bad navigation, bad compass, faulty map, I don't know what the official inquiry ever came at, but it was just an unfortunate accident that happened an one Australian soldier was killed and there was at least 2 or 3 others wounded, because

- 02:30 they opened fire with M60s on each other. One soldier died and there were several wounded.

How did the confusion occur?

Thick jungle and just a fault in navigation. Someone's turned into one another. They've both turned slightly. They've heard movement from one of their flanks, got an M60 and opened fire.

- 03:00 One subunit was in the wrong place or both were in the wrong place. I don't know what the official inquiry.

Where was your unit in this?

Our unit was well away. We heard the firing. As soon as you hear firing and it's in your close proximity you just stop, take up a defensive position as you can and wait to hear from your company commander. The company commander told everyone to cease fire. He picked up straight away

- 03:30 what it was and told both the other 7 and 9 platoon to stop firing 'cos they were firing on one another.

How did the two platoons caught in this crossfire respond to the tragedy?

Pretty well cut up. There was no laughing and singing when we got back to Nui Dat. It was a very morbid time 'cos the guy

04:00 that was killed was a much liked guy. National serviceman. I knew some of the guys that were wounded. It was a pretty solemn time when that happened. To see the first time someone got killed got killed by your own guys. It was pretty heartbreaking.

What was the debrief like?

No one tried to blame anyone.

04:30 It is the best way to go about it I think. It wasn't the first time it had happened. It was by no means the last. It was such an easy thing to happen in such thick jungle. You had primary and secondary growth, you could hardly see more than a couple of metres in front of you. That was just one of the unfortunate things that happened.

05:00 **Were there other unfortunate incidents?**

No. I suppose if we were gonna have one it was most probably best to have it then and get it done with. Not a callous way of looking about it, 'cos I feel for the soldier that got killed, but I suppose we had to learn to be more careful before we opened fire on a suspected enemy. Make sure you see the enemy.

05:30 **How long before you were back on patrol?**

We were back out on patrol within a couple of days going back into other areas of operation. That was the late November. The December we carried out other operations around the Fire Zone Trail. The Fire Zone Trail is

06:00 a cleared area that was cleared by bulldozers through the province of Phuoc Tuy that was used to observe enemy movement so they couldn't use the canopy to cover themselves. We went and set a fire support base up on the fire zone trail. 1RAR had had one down at Digger's Rest 1.

06:30 We established fire support base Digger's Rest 2, which was about half a kilometre away from where the old fire support base was right in the fire zone trail. That's when I think the first time we came into contact with the defoliants. Not that we knew what defoliants were. We'd never been told anything about defoliant. We didn't know what, that word was never used. All we knew they

07:00 flew up and down this fire zone trail every several days and sprayed with defoliant. Weed killer, that's all we knew. We didn't know what we were exposing ourselves to. I don't think any of the company commanders knew. I don't think even the battalion commander knew that they were spraying this stuff directly on top of us. We were using

07:30 local water to fill up our water bottles from these creeks and rivers that were getting sprayed with 245D [herbicide].

Did you have immediate reactions to the defoliant?

Not then that I can remember. A lot of us got skin rashes, but we'd seen some of these skin rashes before. There was an incident after we'd formed Digger's Rest 2 and we had some minor conflicts in

08:00 that area. We moved back to Nui Dat. It was just prior to Christmas and they'd send out different work parties to carry out different tasks. You never had senior NCOs or officers on these work parties. It was usually just the bummy corporals and the baggy bums. I remember one day we were set to spray some

08:30 banana that was growing through the wire in front of our position in Nui Dat. So we got these fire fighting knapsacks that leak everywhere and emptied the water out. We were sent up to pioneer platoon's area, the pioneer platoon is like your mini engineers, and there was a black tar painted drum

09:00 that was tipped on its side with a tap on it. I said to the pioneer sergeant, "Can you tell me what this is that we're putting into these knapsacks to spray the banana that's growing through the wire?" He said, "It's just an oil based weed killer." One of my guys had a knapsack on, Tommy Eaton, and he filled it up. He'd placed his weapon

09:30 down before he filled it up. After he'd filled it up, these have only an air pressure lock in the top of it, they're not for spraying chemicals, they're for fighting fires, and as he bent down to get his rifle the top came off this knapsack and went all over his head, down his face and down his back. He screamed out straight away and I knew something was wrong. So as soon as he screamed out, 'cos he was a

10:00 tough little bugger, I ripped the knapsack off his back with the help of somebody else. By the time I got the shirt off his back he was just about red his whole body. So we just didn't worry about weapons or anything. We just grabbed him and we weren't far from the shower block. We ran into the shower block into the cold water

10:30 to wash him. I didn't know what else to do. He suffered pretty bad with that chemical burn because we didn't know what it was, no one told us. When years later you try to tell people about these things, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and they called us liars. This has all been documented now and I've got copies of all these incidents happening. It just shows you what they did. Them, I'm not blaming

11:00 anyone in particular, I'm saying the establishment, the politicians, did to people, exposed people to

dangers of chemicals.

What do you think was in the drums?

I don't know. It peeled your skin straight away and it was drums painted with black tar paint. They used to use it for undercoating trucks. No markings on it at all. We found out

- 11:30 later on through discussions with different people that apparently it was loaded in Darling Harbour on the Sydney. When they were building the Olympic stadium they found all the toxics in the ground there. The reason it was painted with black tar paint was this was done so that
- 12:00 the enemy, if they found the drums, wouldn't know what was inside them. I think it was more true that we wouldn't know what was inside them. These were the lies that went on for years and years. Our guys have had to fight to get any recognition about how closely we were exposed to these dioxins and pure dioxins. Not the watered down stuff that was banned here in Australia. When I saw his skin go red I just ran into the
- 12:30 showers. I don't know whether I did the right or the wrong thing. At the time I thought that was the only thing I could do. That's how close we were to these toxic chemicals. All the pioneer sergeant said, "It's an oil based weed killer." We never knew what the word "defoliant" meant. We were never told about defoliants. Just "oil based weed killer". It makes you think what might have been in there to make your skin go red within
- 13:00 30 seconds.

You were based on the fire trail?

We had a fire support base on Digger's Rest on the fire zone trail. We operated out of that area for some time.

What operations were you doing from that area?

Search and destroy, ambushing, we had successful ambushes just off the fire zone trail. In one case we ambushed

- 13:30 three people. They were killed. We dug holes, buried the bodies and then some guys came back to get the bodies and we ambushed and killed them. The third time they came back within a bit of force, so we thought that was no good staying around that place too long. We were pretty lucky with our operations in that area for that time before Christmas 1968.
- 14:00 We never went back into Nui Dat. Yes we did, we went back into Nui Dat Christmas Day. So I went back in there and they had a lottery. Who was gonna take out the TAOR patrol for that particular night? You know who lost the lottery. Alley Bruce. So on Christmas Eve I took out the fighting patrol and did a TAOR. I was given
- 14:30 all the dregs from the company headquarters and the cook and the clerk and the pay corporal. When I went back to my section and told them I was taking a patrol out two of my own guys said, "If you're going, so are we." So I felt a bit safer. I went to the company commander and said, "Two of my guys wanna come too." He said, "Why do they wanna go?" "They said if I'm going, they're going." He said,
- 15:00 "Fair enough." So these were pretty great to have guys that said they were going too if I was going 'cos they didn't like the idea of me going out with a pay clerk, the cook and the blanket folders.

That loyalty is a great compliment to your leadership.

Twice during that time nearly the same thing happened. That was later on. My own section said,

- 15:30 "If you're going, so am I." So my forward scout and machine gunner came out with me, which is what I needed anyhow. My forward scout was someone close to me and my machine gunner was used to me. This is the guy that several months before I'd carried his bag when he kept tripping over it. It doesn't hurt to carry someone's bag.

Did anything memorable happen on that patrol?

I had the

- 16:00 OC's [officer commanding] batman [officer's servant] with me as one of the participants in this mixed patrol. We'd laid Claymores out, I lay some DFs down as defensive fire that I could adjust from, which was standard procedure. That night someone waded into the area we were ambushing on this junction and the OC's batman saw him and told him to run away. In the morning when he told me I wanted to tear his head off.
- 16:30 Not because he'd done something so much wrong, but if that guy that got away was a guy that could come back and kill me or one of my soldiers, that's the part of how I looked at it then. Maybe I was bloodthirsty. No, not really. I think you had to get them before they got you was the facts of it. We went back to Nui Dat and had a couple of beers and that was Christmas
- 17:00 Day 1968, the fun was to come.

How long were you in Nui Dat?

We were only there for a few days. Then in January was the start of what they called Tet 2. Taskforce had named an operation "Operation Goodwood". That commenced early in January I think.

- 17:30 We moved out of Nui Dat and were out for 12 weeks in Operation Goodwood and that's when we really had quite a lot of contact. We moved up as a battalion to Bien Hoa province.

What was the purpose of Operation Goodwood?

To stop the NVA. The NVA were coming down in strength trying to get through to Saigon.

- 18:00 This was to buffer them from getting through to Saigon and the taskforce was one of the few times a taskforce was in the field as a taskforce. The taskforce commander was also in the field with all his little hangers-on and MPs [military police] and whatever. The taskforce was in the field. We were outside of Phuoc Tuy province, we'd moved into Bien Hoa province. We were up around Bien Hoa airbase.
- 18:30 We formed a perimeter around that with 4 Battalion on one side and 1 Battalion on the other, if I recall. Even as a section commander you didn't know the whole picture, only your own. That's all you really wanted to know. We formed a perimeter around Long Binh airbase. We dug in
- 19:00 to defend that area to stop the NVA if they came down that way. Some nights later they attacked with rockets Bien Hoa airbase. They decided not to go through any of the Australian battalions, they decided to go around us. They didn't wanna hit the Australian battalions.

Why do you think that was?

'Cos they knew

- 19:30 we'd fight back. I'm not saying that anyone else wasn't gonna fight back, but our kill ratio was well above anybody else's because we were better soldiers. They were pretty good soldiers too, the NVA, but they would have rather gone through the Americans than us. They knew our procedures, they knew how cautious we were how deliberate we were. I
- 20:00 reported the first round into the airfield, 'cos we were in these defensive positions where you're not supposed to smoke or make any noise. I'd snuck a smoke in and I was having a smoke underneath my hat. I heard a primary go off. A primary is when the rocket burst is fired. The secondary is when it hits the ground. Like a good soldier I grabbed my compass and took a compass bearing on
- 20:30 the primary and there's no secondary. Then there was another primary and no secondary. I went and saw the company commander and reported to him that I heard two primaries go off and gave him the bearing. We were in his CP and it worked out to be a higher type feature, this area was pretty flat, a small knoll, and he said,
- 21:00 "I don't know what's going on 'cos you've heard two primaries." I've seen the rockets go over me. I think he's looking at me thinking I might have had something good to drink that night. No one went boozing in the bush. He reported it through to Zero Alpha, which is your battalion command who then notified Victor. I suppose no more than about
- 21:30 20 minutes, half an hour later the whole sky was alive. This time it was primaries and secondaries. They'd sent a guy in near the wire who was hearing the secondary hit the ground without exploding. So they had no charge in them or the charge wasn't armed. Then he adjusted the fire without using live rounds to adjust the fire.
- 22:00 Then all hell broke loose and they rocketed Bien Hoa airbase. So I've never seen so many lights from so many aircraft trying to get up off the ground. Because I reported this location, bearing and estimated distance, which worked out to this knoll they were able to sneak a gunship up into the air and that went and strafed at the position. Next morning, because we reported it, we were saddled
- 22:30 up into APCs and we attacked that position. I rode in the same APC that Normie Rowe was driving. That was the first time I met Normie Rowe except seeing him on TV. He was driving the APC that took us up there. We had Centurions with us. They had already put a couple of air strikes in and they'd napalmed it pretty well. There's some good things about some
- 23:00 napalm [jellied petrol] and there's some bad things, but the good thing is it kills the enemy, the bad thing is it burns the bamboo and the bamboo keeps popping all the time. So as you're advancing you hear all these "pop, pop, pop" as the air explodes inside the bamboo. Every time you hear one of these pops you hug the ground. So we stayed there and they brought in another Phantom air strike and hit the hell out of it with napalm again.
- 23:30 We could direct the fire 'cos we were a lot closer right onto this knoll. We then attacked the position with the tank support. After a while the tanks couldn't get any further. Trees don't stop tanks, bamboo does. It just compresses and compresses until they lift the tank up. They don't like their bellies in the air. So we went on foot up to this position and it was absolutely filled with rockets

- 24:00 that they didn't get off. I'm not saying it was my reporting of that that stopped them from firing all that, but this had been already been logged in with taskforce as a logical area and I'd already reported the primary. So I suppose we got onto it quicker before they could do too much damage. Afterwards the company commander said, "You were right. It was a rocket base and you did report primaries with
- 24:30 no secondary. That's how they were adjusting the fire." So that was quite successful. We captured a lot of unused ammunition, rockets, they were stacked up in between the buttress trees. All over the place. Once the place was hit with Snoopy [a plane heavily armed as a weapons platform for night time firing] and air strikes they got the hell out of there. There was a lot of blood trails and drag marks. They'll take their dead or wounded with them whenever they can. So that was
- 25:00 another lucky operation. After that we moved out of there and went down to, this is still during Operation Goodwood, Route 15. We went in through, from Route 15, some unused rice paddies because one Vietnam produced 43% of the world's rice and because there'd been conflicts for some 30
- 25:30 odd years all these rice fields had secondary growth growing through them. We moved through them and we had another contact that day. We had another contact that night. On the Valentine's Day 1969 my platoon walked into an NVA camp
- 26:00 and the crap really went off then.

How did you manage to walk into an NVA camp?

The night before, we had a contact and we ambushed a wash point. We could see the high feature and we ambushed it and we then went back to the company, 'cos no one had come down and used the wash point. The company commander said, "Look Mac, you know where the trail is, you lead one of the other platoons up the track."

- 26:30 So I went back and said to my section, "You stay here 'cos I'm gonna go lead one of the other platoons up." They all jumped up, packed up their gear and again they said, "If you're going so are we." The platoon commander who was supposed to be in charge was in charge. Looked like everyone had been outvoted and the company commander wasn't gonna stop that sort of dedication. There's no way in the world 'cos he was a great officer too.
- 27:00 We then lead the company up. We found a sentry position where he'd been smoking cigarettes and butting them out. I kept giving the enemy-sign back to the platoon. I asked to drop packs 'cos I didn't wanna fight with 85 pound on my back. I got, "No, don't drop packs. Keep going." I set my section scout
- 27:30 in front of me, I've got my machinegun right up my bum. 'Cos you could smell it. I then confirmed with the platoon commander again. "They're gonna have contact." He said "keep going." They're indoctrinated even more than us. I said, "That's it, I'm dropping packs." He said, "No, you can't." I said, "I'm dropping packs." So I dropped packs. We went about another 20 meters, there's a B52
- 28:00 crater [crater made by a bomb from a B-52 aircraft]. What they used to do was they'd occupy a position, they'd get it B52-ed, then they'd move straight back into it. They had re-dug bunker positions. My forward scout's giving me the enemy move in front of me and I'm watching him and then there's this guy sitting over to my right in a bamboo chair. He's put his AK47 into his shoulder to stand up to shoot my forward scout and he hadn't seen me. All he saw was my forward
- 28:30 scout. He's bringing his weapon up. He half got it up and half got out of the chair and that was the end of his life. I fired a full magazine and blew him to pieces. But by then we were inside the camp. They site their camps like a Y. If you look at a Y, if you come into the middle of the Y, wherever you're coming into it you're coming into crossfire. Little did we know that we were right inside the Y when
- 29:00 I saw the guy in the bamboo chair. We were in there for 2 hours. About 2 o'clock I initiated it. I'd moved up to my forward scout who was by then jumped into the bomb crater. So we were both in the bomb crater and the whole area was covered by 12.7s, which are Russian machineguns. They
- 29:30 were cutting the place to pieces. I'd never heard a noise like it. Everything to me sounded like it was in slow motion. Time stood still. The dirt that was flicking up fast seemed to be flicking up slow. The branches falling out the trees, a 12.7 is a very large machinegun, it was cutting branches down and it sounded like everything was so, it was loud, but it wasn't loud.
- 30:00 So Tom and I were in this bomb crater. There we are, in the middle of an NVA camp getting the shit shot out of us and we both start having an argument. I said, "Tom, you run back to the platoon and I'll cover you." He said, "No. You run back and I'll cover
- 30:30 you." "No, no, Tom. I'm in charge as the section commander. You run back and I'll cover you. I want you to get out first." He said, "No, I want you to get out." This is in the middle of a major fire fight. I said, "Tom, why do you want me to go?" He said "'Cos you're married and have got three kids. I'm not married and I've got no kids. I'm not going unless you go. So we'll both stay here and get killed." So I jumped up and ran back, firing as I was going
- 31:00 as much as I could. I could see the rounds hitting all the trees around me. I jumped over a fallen log that had been blown over when the place had been B52-ed and took up a fire position. My machine gunner

by then had moved up and was firing above where both of us were. Next thing Tom jumps out the hole and it was like, I can't explain, it was like slow motion. All I can see is this petrified look on his face as he's

- 31:30 running towards me. As he's running he trips over a vine and his weapon goes flying out of his hand and I can hear him saying, I couldn't hear what he was saying, but I imagined him saying, "Oh shit. I'm stuffed." But he got up and I was firing above him as best I could at the bunker, but it was right in front of us with a 12.7. How neither of us got hit I don't know.
- 32:00 Got him back and the platoon commander had come up and he said, "God, what is it?" "It's an NVA camp" 'cos they had range finders set up all around the place like little men as targets. They were the range finders for the machineguns. We never saw that when we walked in because we were now in the inside looking back. Before we were on the outside looking in. So it was a different perspective. I
- 32:30 was carrying an M72, which is a rocket launcher. I could see the bunker that was firing. So I said to Tom, "I'm gonna fire the M72 at that bunker and blow the shit out of it." So I primed the M72 and I'm trying to work out when they'd stop firing the 12.7. So I stood up and I fired out of the bunker and I'd no sooner hit the ground than they fired an RPG7 back at me. Straight at me.
- 33:00 It missed me, hit the tree behind me and blew me about 10 feet in the air and blew all wooden splinters in my bum and the back of my legs. It felt like someone had come up behind me and kicked me in the groin and lifted me off the ground, 'cos it took all the wind out of my body. It felt like someone had kicked me in the
- 33:30 private parts real hard. I landed back on the ground and years later one of the guys that was in my section that couldn't get up to support us anyhow because of the fallen logs in the area, said, "There you go. Mac's gone on Valentine's Day." But I hit the ground and I was alive still and kept firing back. Then they sent another platoon around to the right flank of us, South Australian, a very good friend of mine, he
- 34:00 came around on the right flank trying to take the pressure off me. He got hit in the shoulder by a 12.7 and it blew his life away. For years I thought that in one way, if I hadn't seen the wash point and reported it, because I was always using my tracker skills, maybe he wouldn't have been killed. If it was
- 34:30 gonna happen it was most probably gonna happen. In hindsight we found out that the intelligence that was being supplied to the battalion commanders was a little bit misleading. This is from higher authorities. We were actually pushed towards these positions. We didn't bump into these positions, we were pushed to them. I found out that that NVA position
- 35:00 had been notified by SAS reports the previous October. So you didn't walk into something you were led in that general direction. Peter Chant was killed. My machine gunner was shot through the hand so he was out of action. My signaller, part of the shrapnel that lifted me up off the ground
- 35:30 went through my signaller's throat and cut one of his main arteries here and he put a shell dressing on there, only a national serviceman, a tiny bloke. He kept broadcasting the mortar to come in while he was so badly wounded and got out and lived. So they had to get dead and wounded out. We got the
- 36:00 dead out first. Then my two wounded were out. Then one of my riflemen came up and gave us support. Then another national serviceman from one of the other platoons, how he got up there I don't know, his name was Yankevic, he was a big Yugoslav. In his hand an M60 looked like a pistol. All I could see was him belting through the J [jungle] and he's got the M60 in one hand and he's feeding it around with
- 36:30 the other as he walked in to give us. How he got up there, he most probably didn't take any notice 'cos he knew who was up there. He came up and some of these national servicemen were as good, if not better, than a lot of the regular soldiers.

How many men did you lose?

Only the one killed, which was Peter Chant. My two wounded and

- 37:00 one other wounded. Three or four were wounded. We pulled back with a gunship came in and fired on the enemy position. He did a pivot on top of the camp and got shot out of the sky. Then a dust off [evacuation helicopter] came in and he received rounds and then he had to send another dust off in. We were lucky enough to pull back. I remember pulling back and I was carrying 18 magazines and I'd fired the whole 18 magazines. I had nothing
- 37:30 left. I threw a grenade. One NVA was trying to come around and get us from the side and I threw a grenade over the top of some bamboo and I held it for a couple of seconds after I let go of the striker and next thing he went flying, so I got that one that was trying to come around and do the old bull's horn trick on us. We got back to company. By then I think I was completely dehydrated and my tongue was hanging out of my mouth. The
- 38:00 company commander said very relaxed, "Mac, have a drink." He gave me a drink of his water bottle. I had two water bottles on me and never even thought to have a drink myself because I was pretty busy. We couldn't move much then except backwards because that was an NVA company that we hit. We got

fire support from a very large famous battleship. The USS Missouri

38:30 gave us fire support. That was quite a good story on its own, getting fire support from the Missouri. You heard those big rounds come in.

Take me through your wounds again. With your wounds, how did you manage to get back on your own?

I think I was just that full of adrenalin. When I got back to the company I had to go to the toilet.

39:00 I'd been up there for about two hours. I went and did a number two. You just crap wherever you wanna crap because there's no modesty. I had a crap and my forward scout started laughing. I said, "What's wrong with you, you little mongrel?" He said, "Have a look at you. I thought you were always a Sheila." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "you're bleeding everywhere from the bum." So they took me up to the medic and he pulled some of the splinters out and said,

39:30 "You can go out on the dust off if you want to. It's not that bad, it's just a concussion and wood splinters. You can go on the next dust off chopper if you want to," 'cos they were still getting some wounded out. I said, "No, I wanna stay with my men. I don't wanna leave my men." Talk about being indoctrinated and brain dead. If someone said to me this day, "There's a chopper there, you can get out of here," I'd say "Hang on, wait for me." But I stayed there and that night we had another contact.

40:00 It was 5 o'clock when we finally got the place cleared, moved through it and we were moving on the other side of this contact position and we had another contact. So that was 1, 2, 3, 4 contacts in 2 days. Shit for trumps. We were pretty well psyched out of it by then. That was part of Operation Goodwood which went on for 12 weeks and

40:30 there was other contacts that I haven't even spoken about. But they were things that were memorable to me because of Missouri flying fire support on us and a good friend of mine being killed. There was other incidents where Tommy, well I killed a pig one night with a grenade. I hear this movement and my machine gunner said, "I'll open up with my machinegun." I said, "Hang on." You never wanna use a machinegun unless you have to 'cos then they know where your machinegun is. So I threw a grenade and got a pig.

41:00 Didn't they rub that into me? They really stuck it right up me. There was a couple of other incidents where all this time you had these little psychological things are going through your mind and to give you a good example of a psychological thing

Tape 8

00:33 **How did you know that you were getting help from the USS Missouri?**

'Cos I was listening out on the radio set. I hear the forward observer, who was in an aircraft had contact. All your calls into company are then monitored through Zero Alpha, which is your battalion command, which is also

01:00 monitored by Victor Force, which is the main commanding force. They listen out to all these broadcasts. Within the company you've got something like 5 radios. So when you get to a battalion you've got something like 20 radios going all the time. This information is passed from one subunit to the other as far as clearance goes for firing. This is also in your firing and location so it will supposedly, every unit knows where every other unit is. Unfortunately that is not always the case,

01:30 but they were listening out and said they were in the air and couple give fire support in a major battle. At the same time 9 Battalion had 2 companies in contact at the same time. Which was an un-normal thing to have two rifle companies in bunker positions at the same time. I've got a book here that explains how many bunker positions 9 Battalion hit. Some of them may have called us chocolate soldiers, but when we hit

02:00 Vietnam we hit it I suppose at a fairly bad time in the sense that the NVA were moving down. We had a lot of NVA contact. We had contact with the NVA zapper units [killing units]. They didn't run away, they stayed to die. They had no intentions of leaving a fire fight.

How was your psychological state after that instance?

02:30 I suppose it was then you started to, you had been bloodied and you had bloodied, you'd seen people killed. There are some incidents in between these ones that I've described that, how things go in a brain related to a time when I had killed a pig. The next day we

03:00 moved out onto a track. As we did, I noticed, this was I suppose 7:30 in the morning, and I noticed that the dew was still on the grass and there was a foot imprint. I relayed back to my platoon commander that I was on a hot track and there was enemy movement had gone through that track in the direction that we were now travelling.

- 03:30 So they were either behind us or there was more to come. No more than a half a minute, a minute later, I noticed my forward scout go straight down on his knee, that meant one thing to me that there was something in front of him I couldn't see at that time. Next thing these two NVA, sorry they weren't NVA, these two couriers came up the track in front of him. He was in a position to fire straight
- 04:00 away. I fired over his head. We hit the first one, both fired on the first guy. The second one was wounded and was able to run away, but left a large blood trail, which we did later follow up, but it just got bigger and bigger and we were out of our area then to operate. The guy that Tom and myself had shot was dead before he hit the ground. He tried to get his AK47
- 04:30 off his shoulder. When we got to his body his hand was around the AK47 and he was smoking a Marlborough cigarette. So it shows you smoking is not good for you. We searched his body and I found a large amount of money. I thought, "Well, this is gonna be a bit of a booze-up for the boys." Rightly or wrongly I took the money off the body and put it in my pack, which
- 05:00 was about 6,500 Pi, which in Australian dollars at the time was about a couple of hundred dollars Australian. I put this money in my pack.
- 05:30 After we secured the area the company commander came up with his interpreter. His interpreter says, "This man's been on a shopping trip." Some of these people write everything down. He wrote down how much money he had, how much money he had left, where he'd been and what he had bought. The interpreter said to the company commander, "This is a very famous man you've got.
- 06:00 Very important man." I said, "He's only a courier wasn't he?" "No, no." How we get medals and badges and honours, they get tattoos. They get their embellishments, battle honours, tattooed onto their arm. I never knew that until then. This was the interpreter that was telling the company commander. This guy had been a field commander during the battle of Dien Bien Phu.
- 06:30 So he was quite a good one to get. He was senior NVA. He was dressed rather raggedly, but he had all his embellishments of all his battles tattooed on his arm. He had been a commander in the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Here was a guy from Prospect got him. The interpreter said to the company commander,
- 07:00 "This man have a lot of money." The company commander looked at me. He said, "Mac, did he have any money?" I said, "I never saw any," which was an absolute lie. If we were gonna have a booze-up we were gonna use their money. So I had all this money in my pack. After a couple of days we are still patrolling through the same area and this funny thing goes
- 07:30 through my head that I'm carrying a dead man's money. So as the days went on I'm thinking, "Dead man's money. The man that had this money is dead. Maybe it's a curse." These are all the strange things that are going through my head. So I put it in an envelope that I got and posted it to myself back at Nui Dat so that I wouldn't be carrying a dead man's money. By then a guy was starting to loose it wasn't he? I didn't wanna carry that dead man's money.
- 08:00 When we got back to Nui Dat a couple of weeks later here's the envelope with the 6,500 Pi. We were due for an R&C then, which is to go to Vung Tau. We went to Vung Tau and we got boozed up and looked after with the dead man's money. Funny things go through your head. I suppose what I did was wrong. I
- 08:30 never did do everything right. The beer was good that I bought with the dead man's money.

How important was it to get boozed up to wind down?

You go into Vung Tau, the R in C. You were supposed to get one every 4 to 6 months. Didn't always come when you thought it'd come, but

- 09:00 it was still good to get out of that field and let a bit of wildness out of your body in one way or the other. Have a few drinks, talk a bit of crap. It was good to get out for a while. Then we went straight back to Nui Dat. Tommy and myself had been all the places you weren't supposed to go. No, not those places. The American PX [Postal Exchange - American canteen unit] where you
- 09:30 weren't supposed to go and get stuff. We got some big bottles of Seven Blends bourbon. I think they were 40 ounce bottles and we got them for about 6 dollars. We drank these on the truck going back to Nui Dat. Get back and they crashed us straight away and we were inserted straight into a contact area again. I think by the time I got off the helicopter I'd sobered up, but I wasn't feeling very well.
- 10:00 That's the way it goes.

How was the wounds?

They were OK. It was only splinters and stones that had blown when it went off behind me. It was OK. I was better than some of them. That's the main thing. When we had to come in on the choppers when we'd been down there we had a contact then again. It was by that stage of the game we were having a company contact

- 10:30 at least every 5 to 7 days. It was quite a horrific time. The time of the Operation Goodwood. That was

the only relief we had in between that 12 weeks. By then you start to get a bit strange in the brain. You start to argue amongst yourselves for no reason and someone'd make you a cup of coffee and it'd be too hot, too cold, too sweet or

11:00 not sweet enough. So you're starting to lose the plot by then. There was quite a lot of operations in between those times as well we'd gone into. We did a hot insertion. We were up off Route 15 and we'd had a very mild fire fight. We'd fired on some enemy and they'd withdrawn, so there wasn't any great thing there. Next thing we knew there was

11:30 choppers coming in everywhere and we went and did a hot insertion, which is a company airborne assault. We attacked an NVA position later to find out it was an NVA clearing station. Unfortunately for those that were inside there. That's war. We're just doing our job. The best thing, the closest thing you get to an NVA hospital

12:00 and we attacked it. Free fire zone. You don't know what you're attacking when you're attacking it.

What about Operation Overlander?

That was mainly we were up around the Hat Dich area. I can't remember what fire support base that was now. I'd have to look back in the book to see that one.

12:30 That was much the same. A search and destroy type operation. I went very close to an M16 mine during that operation. We crossed the same river crossing twice. We'd come back to cross it the third time and we must have been getting observed and I looked down near my foot and all I saw was three prongs sticking up. I knew what those three prongs were. They were about 2 inches from my foot. They're smart little buggers. They knew that we used the crossing

13:00 once and that we were gonna use it twice and a third time. We did. There was a mine underneath just about underneath my foot. That operation was about 14-15 days. After that I went home in the April 1969. I was gonna re-enlist

13:30 'cos my time of service was up. My favourite little friend told me, Eaton, he said, "Mac, you've been through enough. Go home. If I could go I'd go. Don't re-enlist." I said to the company commander, "I'm tossing up what to do." He said, "Only you can make that decision." So I decided I wasn't gonna sign on and I set off for home to get discharged.

14:00 I took my discharge in April 1969. Got out of the army. Tried a couple of jobs. I suppose I was out of the army about 9 months. A lot of the guys I knew were going back to do a second tour. They said, "Come and join us." I said, "Might as well go back there again."

14:30 Things weren't that very well in my marriage at the time, so, not that I'm blaming that. I blame myself as much as anything else. I re-enlisted and went straight back in as a corporal. I didn't go through any training or anything. I got sent to 3 Battalion at Woodside. A good bunch of guys in 3 Battalion. A lot of them I'd bumped into before.

15:00 I went to tracker platoon, 'cos I'd worked with dogs before. Most the guys in tracker platoon had already been to Vietnam, before, which was Peter Harran, Ernie Baxter, Hans Wall as well, Alan Whitcomb, they were my four section commanders. They'd all been to Vietnam before. Some of the lance corporals had

15:30 been to Vietnam before. Unfortunately we were starting to get some, maybe not better quality officers, in charge of people. My company commander in the support company was a CMF [Citizens Military Force] full time posted soldier. He was doing 12 months full time duty. Academically he was very

16:00 bright. He knew the book from cover to cover. He knew nothing about handling men. Unfortunately the battalion commander wasn't much better. He had spent much of his time in an administration job in the army. He'd been an aid attaché before being posted to the battalion to go to South Vietnam. I can't say very much about either of those two

16:30 people. However the battalion itself was good. The guys were good, but it lacked a little bit to what I'd been used to in other battalions I'd been in. A lot of these guys were going back for their second tour of duty. Our platoon commander was a national service officer. Could have been very easily indoctrinated in the blood, guts and glory. The reality

17:00 of it. I don't think he understood. We trained with the dogs here in Australia. In 1971 we left for Vietnam by plane. We were the rear party because we left our dogs behind. We were taking over third or fourth hand dogs in Vietnam. When we got to Vietnam we found the dogs were completely useless. They'd been through, they were finished. So we took them down

17:30 to Long Binh to the veterinary unit and left them there. I can only imagine what would have happened to them at the veterinary unit. Then we returned to Nui Dat where things weren't really good in a lot of ways. I can't complain about the soldiers, the soldiers were very good. After going out on some operations with this particular

18:00 second lieutenant, he had no intentions of listening to anybody. I think most probably there was too

many experienced soldiers in one unit. That was I suppose a hindrance to him and it was definitely a hindrance to us. He made quite a few mistakes, which I've met him since and he admits that he did make because he was as young, over-enthusiastic officer

- 18:30 being led by two unexperienced, over-educated officers. Not that I'm an officer-hater, but in this case it was a bad clash. This officer eventually relieved himself of command, this platoon commander. I took over as platoon commander for 3 weeks until another officer came in from Australia.
- 19:00 After some 2 months I was pulled before the battalion commander and was chewed to pieces because of this officer relieving himself of command. Because they had to blame somebody. I'm afraid the officers' club is like the politicians' club, the judges' club, they all stick together. Someone had the word and they kept the pressure on me until I finally bent with the pressure
- 19:30 and I was discharged from the army in 1971 by what I thought was I requested a discharge because what had happened. There was so much involved in this I don't know if you wanna know it all. Because it could reflect on some people. By all means, you can check up on it if you wish. I elected my discharge, I
- 20:00 signed my discharge papers to elect my own discharge. In 1980 when I had a bad heart turn I asked for a copy of my discharge papers from army headquarters. I was discharged in 1971 without any medical help as discharged medically and psychologically unfit for military service and received no help, no compensation, no medical. So that was not a real good time.
- 20:30 They did some funny things. Someone had to be blamed and it was gonna be me. So that was the end of my military career.

Before you left 9 Battalion there was a night that you got arrested.

No, that was with 3 Battalion.

- 21:00 They had the moratorium administration in Adelaide. We were at Woodside and they had the 1970 moratorium demonstration. This is when the university students and socialists all got together and were carrying Viet Cong flags. As it happened the battalion used to have a stand down weekend once a month. The
- 21:30 stand down weekend fell the same day as the moratorium demonstration. So you had a whole battalion of guys, some of which had already served in Vietnam, that were in Adelaide having a day out the same day as the moratorium demonstration. I was in the hotel with some of my soldiers having a beer. Being a sergeant you weren't really supposed to drink with the soldiers, but I'd already had
- 22:00 this out with the RSM and I told him that I was gonna fight with the soldiers, not with him and the rest of the sergeants. We didn't see eye to eye. Maybe I said too much. They had this demonstration. They're walking up and down the street with Viet Cong flags waving. There was about 70 of us all got together, all in civilian. We went down to King William Street and linked arms across King William Street and we stopped 2,500.
- 22:30 They then started hitting us on the head with these Viet Cong flags and we took some of them off them and hit them with them. One police officer said to me, "Drop those two bits of stick." I dropped my two bits of stick and he said, "Now you're right," which meant I could get stuck into it again. But all the TV stations were down with their cameras rolling and all the news photographers were there taking photographs. It shows you how fast the army can move
- 23:00 when they want to. Within 7 hours they had confiscated all the TV footage, all the press photographer footage and was starting to observe all this stuff trying to recognise the soldiers that were involved in this unlawful, terrible thing where we'd stopped these civilians from walking in the street. I was identified and I was arrested by the Service
- 23:30 Investigation Bureau, SIB, and I was placed under open arrest in the sergeants' mess. The next day we were interviewed. I was interviewed by a warrant officer for the Service Investigation Bureau. Within this 24 hour period of this happening and us being fronted up, they had a questionnaire already printed out, something like 1-20 questions, "Were you politically
- 24:00 motivated? Did someone prompt you?" All these types of questions as to why we were involved. "Had you been drunk at the time?" Whatever. So I decided not to answer any of these questions. I turned the form sideways and wrote across it, "Force 3228, Sergeant A.B. McCulloch, I have served in South Vietnam before, sir." And handed it to this warrant officer. I don't think he was very impressed, but I wasn't worried about that. I had to front he battalion
- 24:30 commander. He said, "I've got evidence that you have been involved with a demonstration and you have assaulted civilians." I'm standing there trying to keep a straight face. He shows me this photograph and I've got this guy by the throat and I'm twisting his shirt. I'm punching him in the face at the same time. He said, "Is this you?" I said, "Yes, sir, it is." I couldn't help it and I started to laugh. He said, "It's no laughing matter.
- 25:00 A senior NCO involved in a street disturbance. You're gonna be in a lot of trouble" so they gave me a

severe reprimand and fined me \$50. There was so much outcry from the ex military civilian population and the RSL [Returned and Services League] and different other organisations, that some months later, I was in Vietnam, and I was called up to battalion headquarters. They said,

25:30 "You know that fine you had for \$50? That's been squashed and is being paid back into your pay book. The only thing that will stay there is a severe reprimand." That was my little run-in with the SIB. Out of all the battalions I served in, for some reason, 3, not men wise, not the soldiers wise, but there was a

26:00 bad feeling. Every other battalion I'd been in they had company photos, platoon photos, section photos. This battalion didn't seem to have any company photos. I can't remember there ever being platoon photos. There was something that was lacked. Whether it was the fact that there were too many guys that had already been to Vietnam in it or not I don't know. It was just to me, it may have been just me,

26:30 'cos they psychologically discharged me, so it must have been me. I just didn't really enjoy my time, except the time with the soldiers in 3 Battalion. I bet you Peter has talked about it. He's probably trying to be as politically correct as I'm trying to be. Because I don't wanna

27:00 say too much about it. He's the battalion commander's grand daughter. He's still alive. He's very ill. He lives here in Adelaide. His name is Peter Scott. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Scott. I don't think you'll hear anyone saying any nice words about Peter Scott. His grand daughter just became an officer in the army so I

27:30 won't hold anything against him to reflect onto her possibly.

When you were platoon sergeant for the tracker unit in 3 Battalion, how did the tracker unit work?

I couldn't have

28:00 asked for a better group of guys. I think I had too much experience in one unit. My four section commanders had already been to Vietnam once. Two if my lance corporals had been to Vietnam. I had a good bunch of national servicemen. I had two good dog handlers. Les McNichol and Alan Dwyer. Both very good at their job.

28:30 Alan Dwyer went on to be awarded the Star of Courage with the New South Wales fire department some years later. They were both quite good dog handlers. The experience I had with working with them with the dogs, they were very competent. We were looking forward to going with these dogs to Vietnam. At the last moment it was decided these two dogs wouldn't go. We'd take over dogs that were already there, which

29:00 those two dogs that were there were just finished. Their use by date was up. Everyone knew Vietnam was just about over. That's why some of these desk soldiers had been brought out to go overseas to get their final promotions. That's how I saw it and that's how a lot of other people saw it as well. It wasn't just my own opinion. It was the opinion of quite a few people that some of these people should not have been there.

29:30 But it was the way the army works in their wisdom. They've done it before and will most probably do it again.

A dog tracking unit was still a relatively new thing for the army.

The dogs had been used successfully in Vietnam. Especially with the earlier battalions. I can never recall using them when I was with 9. I did see them in the field. They were available, but

30:00 they'd never been used. I think a lot of the company commanders were a little bit hesitant to call dogs in and commit their own soldiers to follow up behind the dog. That's how it appeared to me. Most the company commanders were very good soldiers and were a little bit reluctant to follow the dogs into a lion's den in a lot of cases. They had successes with dogs. Later on,

30:30 I think there was pressure put on the company commanders as well to be as careful with soldiers' lives. I think they had this pressure from above as well as the pressure of losing their own soldiers that stopped them from using them. There was a fair bit of political pressure going on towards the latter part as well. It would have been nice to use them more. It would have been nice to take our own dogs with 3 Battalion, but the decision was already

31:00 made that 3 Battalion would most probably not carry out a full tour of duty because of the escalation of the war. Australia being withdrawn. I think that had a lot to do with it. In the early days in Vietnam they were used quite well and quite successfully. They weren't in the latter stages. I think people were being a lot more careful.

31:30 **Why were people like Peter willing to go back for their second tour?**

He'd actually gone to tracker wing after he came back from 2RAR. Then he was sent down to 3 Battalion to go to 3 Battalion tracker platoon, which was reforming as a

32:00 section commander. That was gonna be his job as a team commander. The 4 full corporals I had, had

already been in Vietnam, before and they were regular soldiers. I suppose if that's your job, that's your job, but we were all starting to give it a few second thoughts by then I think too. Because you could see the end was in sight. No one was winning, no one was losing. It was

32:30 like just fighting on the same bit of ground all the time. Keep clearing the same ground. You went over ground you'd gone over before. You'd been to some of the places before, you'd had contacts in some of the places before. It was, my first tour of duty in South Vietnam was OK. The second one for some reason just didn't feel the same. Whether I was just over-wearing

33:00 myself, same as some of the other people were. I don't know. I can't explain it.

How battle fatigued do you think everybody was?

Your nerves are always gonna be affected in different ways. I can remember a soldier, a reinforcement, coming to us in 9 Battalion who pulled a

33:30 fruity one night. What I mean with fruity, we had a reinforcement come in with our afternoon water resupply and ration resupply. Company commander called me aside and said, "Look, Mac. This guy's got two stripes on his shoulder, but don't take any notice of him. Take him down to your section area, keep and eye on him and let me know how he settles in." As time went on during the different campaigns, operations,

34:00 you're supposed to have a 10 man section, well, you never got a 10 man section. You normally got 5 or 6. But you're still required to carry out the duties of a 10 man section. It can be fairly hard. You break a lot of rules. I know I have, and I know other soldiers have. You cannot do with 5 men what it takes 10 men to do. You can't have double pickets. This is what's required. Double pickets. It's laid down

34:30 in the SOPs, standard operational procedures "Two pickets will be posted," and all this sort of crap. Well, you can't do it. It's absolutely impossible. It's great in the book, but you can't do it in the field. I only put out a one man picket. I put this guy out for a picket and said, "I'll be back to pick you up in about an hour's time. Just sit here. Anything comes on, move back in the perimeter through the machinegun and

35:00 let us know if you hear any movement." He's only out there for about 10 minutes. Back he came running and screaming and yelling and cocking his rifle. He wasn't silly enough to pull the trigger, but he was silly enough to cock it and keep extracting around for the magazine. My forward scout rugby tackled him and threw him on the ground. I sat on his head and got the company commander came down with one of the medics and looked at him. He was putting a fairly good act on.

35:30 Whether it was an act or not, I don't know. I'm not qualified to make that decision. We had to tie him up with ropes so he wouldn't hurt himself or anyone else. He pulled his bayonet out and pretended to stab himself. We hogtied him and sat with him all night and kept him quiet. The next morning we took him out on a chopper and back to Nui Dat. Where he went from there I don't know.

36:00 At the time, "What a gutless mongrel." Then when you look at things later and maybe he just wasn't meant to be there. So maybe him doing what he did, whether it was voluntary or not, it was most probably the safest thing for the rest of us. Rather than it happen under a contact situation. I thought at the time that bloke must be a coward. Who can think who's a coward?

36:30 For what reason? We've all got different things we can endure. Some people can endure more heat. Some people can endure more weight on their back. Stress, nerves, dispositions, we're all different. Maybe he'd just gone. Being out there in the long grass was enough for him to throw that switch. I look at it now and think

37:00 not as hard as I did, because after what I'd been through and what was said about me because of my concern for soldiers' lives, I threw my military career away. They said that I was psychologically bothered and physically impaired. They never offered me anything.

37:30 What was the worst thing about the jungle?

The worst thing about being in the jungle. The worst thing. The dampness. The wet season was the worst. It was wet. Everything was wet. You were wet. The quietness, when it was quiet and still

38:00 too I suppose. When it was quiet it was OK, when it was noisy. I suppose the wetness, the heat, the humidity. That didn't worry me a great deal. Some people were struck real bad with it. It never seemed to affect me that bad. I felt safe there I suppose with the quietness and with everyone around you.

38:30 I felt better in the free fire zone, which was the jungle, than I did in a civilian access area with people and noise. A lot of the guys were saying the same thing. They felt more relaxed in the J than they did back in Nui Dat or walking around the streets in Vung Tau. That's the best way I can explain it.

39:00 What was the best defence?

Don't make any noise and don't be found. Find them before they find you. Our tactics of ambushing was most probably the best. It was the best way not to get any injuries yourself. If you're just going in and out of bunker positions you're in big strife. We found that out.

Tape 9

00:33 Talk about the difference between the conflict you had in 3 Battalion and the other battalions you were with previously.

I suppose in a lot of ways there was a lot of soldiers, a lot of junior NCOs that had already been to Vietnam. I'd already been to Vietnam. I suppose I was being over-cautious.

- 01:00 Some of the decisions that were made by commanders within 3 Battalion were in my opinion and in the opinion of some of the soldiers that had already served in Vietnam, were rather stupid ways of carrying out operations where we thought they were endangering lives. Some of the things I recall now; I remember one night we were
- 01:30 going out to set an ambush up. Already been in Vietnam before my section commander had been there and I was trying not to undermine an officer, which I know is my job as platoon sergeant. Don't undermine the officer. We set up an ambush. I went up to the platoon commander and I said, "This is a good spot for an ambush, however there are a couple of down points in it. It's
- 02:00 too open and when the moon comes up here at 2 o'clock in the morning, it's gonna be like daylight." He said, "But it's dark now." I was trying not to force my opinion on him, but I thought the position was bad because it was too open. He, as a young officer, didn't wanna listen to myself or any of the other section commanders. I suppose he was a bit resentful that we had
- 02:30 already been in conflict before and he hadn't. I've spoken to him in later years and he admitted that this was possibly the problem. 2 o'clock in the morning in this ambush position, the moon came up and it was like daylight. You could see everyone, everyone's position. It was silly things like that where junior officer won't listen to anyone and endangered lives. The soldiers
- 03:00 really expected me to stick up for them and look after their wellbeing, which I'm supposed to do. I'm also supposed to back up the platoon commander's good or bad decisions. It got that bad that at one stage where in stead of him having the live clackers for the Claymores the section commanders would go out and set up their Claymores and they'd give him one set of clackers that was connected to nothing and give me the set of clackers
- 03:30 that was set to the Claymores where the section commanders had decided to site them. He was a very junior officer. He was very hard to explain things to. He was bad in siting Claymores because he was siting them straight in front of friendly forces, which was our guys on the ground, and the section commanders were shifting them and giving me the live clackers. I knew that was wrong.
- 04:00 However, I was in a position where it was very hard to go either way. On another occasion we were attached to a rifle company. The rifle company had a contact. He got half our platoon up to do a sweep in front of the contact area. Hadn't got clearance from company. I ran over to
- 04:30 the CSM and said, "Has he got clearance to move out and do a sweep in front of your company position?" He said, "Mo. The guns are ready to fire." So I had to run out and stop him from doing the sweep so that he wouldn't endanger the platoon of being shot by friendly fire. Some of those silly things like that went on. We were lucky not to have anything real bad happen.
- 05:00 I don't want to down-talk that officer, except he wouldn't listen. There was another occasion where I was injured by moving up onto packs and then coming under fire while we were portering packs. If you can imagine what it's like to have your own pack on your back and then another pack on top of your pack and then come under enemy fire. I jumped into a bomb crater and dislocated my shoulder and neck.
- 05:30 Now I suffer with spinal spondylosis. I had no other choice I could do than to jump in the bomb crater to get out of being shot. There was another occasion when we were out on our own as a platoon. There was a bracket shoot. That's when an artillery fire a particular grid square, left to right, up
- 06:00 and down. It's what they call H&I, harassing [and interdiction] fire. They'd do these bracket shoots. I said to the platoon commander at the time, "Sir, they're bracketing in on us. Either our lock stat's wrong or there's something wrong with the gun sights. Will you get through to Zero Alpha and confirm the lock stats?" Which he did do. They confirmed our lock stat. He told them that the guns were bearing down
- 06:30 onto us. Next thing the three guns fired and went straight through our position. One guy got brunt by shrapnel and one had shrapnel in his leg. One had shrapnel go through his pack. I then asked him to do a check fire, which is when everyone stops firing until they find out what the fault is. He was hesitant, but he did in the end call a check fire. When it was all
- 07:00 sorted out the gun sights were 15 mills out. The lance bombardier that was in charge of the guns, I found out later on, was relieved of his rank.

What was the major difference between your two tours of Vietnam?

The soldiers were just as good. In a lot of cases it was very poor leadership from the RSM, the battalion commander,

- 07:30 to my own company commander. The rifle companies had it pretty well together. It was just some others had got in through the screen somehow. This situation that led up to the platoon commander relieving himself of command, I could see it coming. He was starting to be undermined. I had no one to approach. I had an RSM
- 08:00 that I could not approach. I had a CSM of my own company that was unapproachable. I had a company commander that was unapproachable. The only one I could have approached, I found out later, after everything had happened, was the actual ops [operations] officer, who was a major. He had no idea this bad conflict within the subunit was going on. The tracker platoon.
- 08:30 In the end one night we'd gone back to Nui Dat and we were having a drink at the company boozier and a barbeque because we'd been out a couple of weeks. One of the soldiers got a little bit drunk and informed the platoon commander that when we were in ambush that he never had the clackers, I as platoon sergeant had the clackers. He approached me and said, "Is this true?" I said, "Yes, sir. It's true. Because you weren't listening to the
- 09:00 NCOs". Which he really doesn't have to, but you think sometimes people would take a bit of advice as far as safety goes. We all knew it was just about over and saw no reason to waste lives through stupidity. We were all brainwashed, but second time around the brainwashing doesn't work so good. He then relieved himself of command. Then things were
- 09:30 quite good for a couple of months. We got a new platoon commander in. We were doing TAORs out of the fire support base, which was Fire Support Base Beth. However, every time within our platoon it's split in half. The platoon commander takes one half and the platoon sergeant takes the other half. My half of the platoon was going out every night just as the hot boxes were relieved in the fire support base.
- 10:00 We were doing TAORs at the fire support base every night. This was starting to affect the soldiers. I was then asked by the battalion commander to parade all my NCOs, full corporals, to him to have a talk to him. I went back and said to my section commanders, "We're going up to see the battalion commander." This was in a fire support base in an operational area.
- 10:30 I approached the battalion commander and being the senior I paid a compliment. Next thing he started yelling at me and said, "You aren't doing this correctly. I asked you 'parade your soldiers to me' not just walk up here slackly." So I had to go back, take their webbing to pieces, put their webbing belt on, shoulder their arms, march them up, pay all compliments, left turn, right turn, yes sir, no sir, three
- 11:00 bags full, in a fire support base, which I'd never seen done before. He then tore pieces out of myself in front of my junior NCOs, which is not the way to handle a case. Not that I handled it that well myself, but to abuse a sergeant in front of the corporals and then to abuse the corporals in front of the sergeant was bad man management. After that he sent me out on a patrol of the Song Rai river.
- 11:30 The Song Rai River in the wet season is a very large, fast flowing stormwater drain. When it's dry it's 15 meters wide and 15 meters high and has a trickle of water in the bottom. My orders were to take a patrol out and search the Song Rai River, which I did. I had done tracker training. I knew how to search. You search by doing a zigzag. You go a certain distance, look for a safe crossing, go across, do a search that side,
- 12:00 cross where it's safe. I returned after that day's patrolling with my half of the platoon. I was asked by the battalion commander to give him a debrief on what I'd seen in that area, 'cos there was enemy movement supposedly seen there. We saw nothing. I had visual trackers with me that saw nothing. He said, "How did you carry out your search, sergeant?" I told him I went 200 meter, crossed, 100 meters, crossed, 200 meters, crossed, for the whole 5 clicks that I did.
- 12:30 He said, "Sergeant, that's not what I told you to do. I told you to search the river. That means that you get down in it and walk in it." Basic infantry tactics are never get yourself in a defole, and a defole is walking in a big stormwater drain. You don't do that. I explained to him that's not tactically the safe way and it was only a 12 man patrol. We were 4,000
- 13:00 meters from the fire support base on our own. You don't put yourself in a position where one automatic rifle can fire down a creek bed and hit the lot of you. He yelled at me and thumped the table in the CP and the ops officer told me to leave the CP. After he abused me he abused one of the captains and told him to leave the CP. So as battalion commanders went, he
- 13:30 was not the best I've come across. Most of them I talk very highly of, but unfortunately this particular battalion commander was not the best. After that incident he sent me to the Horseshoe, which was a fire support base for Nui Dat that could fire on Nui Dat if Nui Dat was being attacked or Nui Dat could fire on the Horseshoe. I was ordered to take a patrol out at 5 o'clock,
- 14:00 half a platoon patrol again of about 15 men. Maybe not even that. 12 at the most. My time out was 5

o'clock. I got my half of the platoon assembled at 5 o'clock to go out on the patrol. This patrol was to move down the high side of the Horseshoe, which was a minefield. It had a zigzag track going out of it, which was quite safe, so we weren't walking in the minefield, we were walking down the track that

- 14:30 came in and out. However, on the other side of the minefield I was to take part in an ambush that also involved ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] and a tank ambush. Now, tanks at night are very hard to navigate because they're full of metal. I don't want to take anything away from the armoured corps, but quite often they're not where they think they are. The ARVN you don't know where they are.
- 15:00 I was quite happy to move out at 5 o'clock. 5 o'clock became 6 o'clock, 6 o'clock became 7 o'clock, it became very dark. I had soldiers getting very nervous. I had one second tour soldier that was nearly hysterical. 8 o'clock came, still nothing. 9 o'clock I was ordered to move out and I refused to go out. I went and saw the company commander of the company that was in there and I said,
- 15:30 "I can't move out. It's 9 o'clock. We're moving through an ARVN and tank ambush, it's just not tactically safe to do that." He said, "That's the battalion commander's orders." I said, "I'm refusing that order. My guys are too nervous. I can't take them out." One second tour guy was just about in tears. One full corporal was shaking like a leaf. I wasn't real happy about it either. So I went back and told him I refused to take the
- 16:00 battalion commanders orders. So that was the end of me. They took me back to Nui Dat. I went and saw the corps rep who was infantry rep with taskforce who was a full colonel. I explained it to the full colonel and he said, "Well, things aren't really that good with 3 Battalion. You have five options. You can go to AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam], you can go to Matt's team", 'cos I already had some (UNCLEAR)
- 16:30 "You can go back and join a unit in Australia or you can go to one of the training battalions." I said, "You said five. What's the fifth one?" He said, "You can elect a discharge." I said, "That'll do me. What's happened now would follow me forever, refusing the battalion commander's orders, so I think I'd better take a discharge." He said, "I'm sorry. Can I talk you out of it?" "You, you can't."
- 17:00 So I then went and saw the RSM and I relieved myself of command. I didn't want any reflection on the sergeants' mess or the sergeants, so I revoked my rank as a sergeant and held the rank of corporal. I didn't feel like going bashing dixies [large iron cooking pot] and doing work parties. I signed as corporal and it took about a month before they got me out of there. I saw some of the signals that came through from
- 17:30 army headquarters to the battalion commander. They were words to the effect, "Any more trouble with senior NCOs and there will be a full investigation in your unit." When I was finally discharged I was discharged as a sergeant. Relinquishing my rank had not been accepted by the army. I was discharged as a sergeant. When I signed my discharge paper it read on it,
- 18:00 "Member elects discharge." That's what I signed. However, some 10 years later, I found that on asking for my medical records that I was discharged as medically and psychologically unfit for military service after I tried to get some decent job in Australia.
- 18:30 **Coming back to Australia there was quite a strong objection to Vietnam. How did you respond to civilian life having served in Vietnam?**
- I suppose for the next 20 years
- 19:00 I hid in a bottle. I drank excessive alcohol. I got into trouble with the police. I tried to get help. I approached the Department of Veterans' Affairs, not knowing what was actually written on my bit of paper. I tried the South Australia police, I tried the customs, I tried the corrective services, I tried the federal police, everywhere I went I got knocked back. It was because they were then
- 19:30 giving information that was on my medical discharge certificate, not what I signed. I never knew that for 10 years. I suppose I felt guilty about what happened in Vietnam because I had no contact with any of the soldiers. I wasn't capable of having any contact with them. However, since then I have made contact with all these soldiers, including the junior officer I was talking about.
- 20:00 They all blame people that led to this rather than myself. I was locked up in jail for 3 months for a drink driving charge and resisting arrest. When I went to see a psychiatrist about my drinking problem the psychiatrist said, "Go to jail. Do some time in jail, you'll feel better when you get out."
- 20:30 While I was in jail my wife had an affair, got pregnant by her boyfriend and put all my 5 children into foster care. I got out of jail after 3 months in jail and find my children in foster care. It was then that I should have spoken up and got the hell out of the marriage. I didn't. I tried to keep together for the children. If someone today asks me to keep a marriage together for children I would say they were completely
- 21:00 wrong to keep a marriage together for children. It's over.

I feel there was a lot of anger when you came back to civilian life.

Yeah.

How did you make peace with yourself?

Not until 1999. That was a self help program run by a very good friend of mine, Peter Harran and Bob Carney. This was a course

- 21:30 done in the Flinders Ranges called Operation Trojan Trek. This is run by war veterans. Until 1999 I was drinking heavy. After I started talking with some guys I'd served with, which I'd been reluctant to do beforehand because I had this guilt thing that everything was my fault and I'd failed in my job. I suppose I had, but it wasn't all my fault, but I was blaming myself
- 22:00 all the way for everything. For my marriage break-up to everything I could possibly think of I blamed myself. After talking to some ex-soldiers and soldiers I'd served with and getting some reassurance from them, the last drink of alcohol I ever had was on the 5th of September 1999 and I've never had a drink since. I've come to peace with myself after starting to make a point of seeing some of these soldiers that
- 22:30 I'd served with.

The treatment of Vietnam vets hasn't always been as positive as say for World War II veterans. How do you feel about the way Vietnam veterans have been treated in public light?

Pretty poorly. Especially when it came to getting psychological and medical help. The Department of Veterans' Affairs does a reasonably good job now, however in the

- 23:00 1970s they did nothing. Their psychiatrists did nothing. They didn't understand the stress that we had to go through. I tried to talk to some Second World War soldiers and they said, "But you had it easy. You went from point A to point B by helicopter. You didn't have to walk." I said, "Yeah, but you walked for two weeks to get there, we were there one fire fight, into a helicopter, into another fire fight. You could have two fire fights in one day. You didn't
- 23:30 have time to be in the jungle," relating to a previous question, "and quietness and come back down. You were pushed all the time." They had relief in place after 7 days. We were doing, some of our units, 2RAR did 15 weeks straight. With 9 Battalion, I done 12 weeks straight. It was a different war, a different time. It was mostly too fast for our brains to keep up with. A lot of people, including
- 24:00 ex soldiers, Second World War, did not understand it. I think in a lot of ways they had as much bad things happen to them. What they called shell shock in the First World War they didn't understand. What they called "battle fatigue" in the Second World War, what they call PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] today is all much the same. Different periods, different amounts of it in such a short time. I had
- 24:30 problems getting a job. I can remember going to one job that was a very union oriented job. They asked me where had I been and I said "I just come back from Vietnam." All of a sudden there were no vacancies in that job because the Labour Party at the time, I point the finger at them, through their union movement Vietnam was a dirty word. They used it that way. They stopped our mail going to us during 1971. The postal workers' union wouldn't send mail.
- 25:00 OK, I was a regular soldier. If I didn't get mail that was my fault. But you've got these young national servicemen that had never been away from mum or dad before, what right have some socialist do-gooder got to say these young soldiers shouldn't have got their mail? Crap. They're all guilty. Then you had trouble with the teachers' union and trouble with the waterside workers' union.
- 25:30 I didn't mind them demonstrating, I didn't mind them throwing stuff. But they didn't have to throw the paint and the poo at the soldiers. If they wanted to throw the paint and the poo they should have thrown it at the politicians, not the soldiers. That's where the socialist movement in this country's gone backwards. I think it's gone backwards ever since, because all us people have got family and friends that we tell about these things. They've got a lot to answer for in my opinion.

During action, at what stage did you start to think about the women and children?

Usually after a contact or a bad hard day you'd try to turn your brain off, but your brain got in such a high gear it's hard to turn it off. It's even hard for

- 26:30 me now to turn my brain off. I wake up early every morning. At 5 o'clock at the latest I'm awake. I'll lay there and think about things. The best thing I can do is put a headset on and listen to the wireless, music or something. We did much the same thing in Vietnam. We'd carry these little very cheap transistor radios and we'd listen to the forces' radio and then you'd maybe think of home and your family, but you had
- 27:00 to listen to something besides gunfire and conflict.

Have you experienced any nightmares or post traumatic stress from your years in Vietnam?

Oh yeah. I quite often think of the guy with the three children. I think of the two nurses that were killed. I didn't pull the trigger, but I was there when

- 27:30 two Vietnamese nurses were killed. It was an accident, it was combat. I still think of that. It's pretty

hard to describe some of the things you saw. In the times I was in Vietnam I never ever saw a deliberate atrocity. I know of so-called atrocities happening. A lot of that leaves a lot of guilt. I know of unarmed people that were killed in civilian access areas. That makes

28:00 me angry. But there was nothing I could do about it. It was carried out by some people that most probably needed more psychological help than myself. I never killed an unarmed person. But I know that there are cases where it had happened. It just leaves a funny emptiness when you think of the lost years that you have also suffered through bad time

28:30 drink. I rarely can remember anything for nearly a 20 year period. I can remember things, but not everything, because I chose to jump into a bottle and hide from it. Get drunk, go to sleep and forget about it until I started to face up to it with help from other veterans. That was something we should have had when we came home. I'm not taking anything away from fire-fighters. But a fire-fighter today,

29:00 I'll just use an example, sees a child burnt in a house, they get counselled and they get stress leave and all the help. We got nothing. We got sent home. "There, you're not wanted anymore. Goodbye." We got nothing. Any wind down period, after seeing some horrific things. I saw a foetus laying on the ground that was blown out of some woman. Hell. I might be pretty hard, but I'm not that hard. Other guys saw that too. There was no one we could

29:30 talk to about it. We all felt a little bit of internal guilt for these things that weren't our fault. They were out of our control. We had the bad nights and the politicians got the full pockets and slept well in their luxurious mansions. It still goes on.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

Once it meant a time I could go and get drunk. Now

30:00 it means I've gotta go and drink my Diet Coke and I like to see the guys. There's good times, funny times. There's always good times. You remember the good times. The bad times you try to push back, but it does help sometimes to push the bad things forward so you can try to clear them a little bit.

30:30 How did you feel about Vietnam being known as a "no-win" war?

I felt there was 507 lives that were lost for a heap of crap. It still goes on. We just haven't learned anything. All I can ever ask is that never again do soldiers get treated badly like we were treated. I don't want parade waving, but just not this complete

31:00 negative feeling towards veterans. I was lucky enough to go to America with the "Touched By Fire" panels, which were painted by Derek Walsh who painted the panels as part of his therapy. My job to go to America with these was to walk Americans through these 12 panels and try and explain them to them. When you got to panel 12

31:30 you've got the last two people that were killed that were two civilian nurses on the plane that crashed and you've got a row of white crosses that run across the panels. I feel more for those white crosses than I do for the 507 guys that were killed in Vietnam. They died with their mates and were surrounded with their comrades. These white crosses are guys that died of mental problems,

32:00 physical, psychological and who have suicided. I have been to a funeral of suicide soldiers who have died in a shed and blown their brains out. Others who have drunk themselves to death. I feel sorer for them than I do for the soldiers that died with their comrades, 'cos they died on their own.

32:30 What would you say, throughout your military career, has been your proudest moment?

I don't know. Proudest moment. I suppose when I was made corporal. Yeah. I went from a private soldier to a corporal. I was promoted my army headquarters

33:00 too. I remember the day that my platoon sergeant, when I was in 4 Battalion, came and said, "There's a big mistake here, Mac." I said, "What do you mean a 'big mistake'?" He said, "I've got a signal from Canberra, central army records office, that you're to be promoted from private group 3 to standard corporal group 6, signed by the director of infantry."

33:30 "That's me." I didn't expect it, but they were looking for, I think when there's conflicts like Vietnam on a lot of the hard cases seem to be promoted and the goody-two-shoes are overlooked unless there's some safe area for them. When there's a real stoush on they look for the rough edges. They found it in plenty of us.

34:00 How would you like your experiences to be remembered?

I suppose that people would never ever do again to Australian soldiers what they did to us via the union movement and some of the academics in this country. I'm not saying the academics are wrong or right, I'm not saying the unions were right or wrong, but they should have left the soldiers

34:30 alone. They had plenty of time to go and do something for politicians. They had elections where they can vote. They had no right to affect the soldiers. It's affected those soldiers ever since. Some of them still haven't come out of the woodwork. Their families know there's a problem with them. I get around

quite a bit now and see as many as I can. Tell them my experiences.

35:00 I know how bad drink affected me. I know how bad drink affected some of my colleagues, which was Peter Harran. Peter Harran haven't had a drink for 18-20 years something like that. Bob Carney, him and I were the battalion drunks in 3 Battalion in the sergeants' mess. He hasn't had a drink for well over 20 years. Holds a responsible job in Adelaide. I suppose the booze was just an easy

35:30 way out. A lot of us used it. Those that have got over it now are trying to get the message through to the other guys. You can have a good time drinking Diet Coke and you can remember everything the next day. So when I gave up booze I rewarded myself and I bought a motorbike again. Now when I don't feel real good or a little bit down I hop on my motorbike and go for a ride and I feel a lot better. I'm a lot more peaceful in myself

36:00 now than I was 20 years ago.

How did your army career change you?

I was always a clown. I know when I came home from Vietnam all my family, my sister, my aunties and my mother said, "What's wrong with you? You're different." You couldn't explain to these people how you were affected. No one understood. No one really understood

36:30 what had happened in that 9 year period of my life how the things I had seen, things I couldn't talk about until now. How it had affected me. How close you get to that breaking point. That's why I say now, "We all have a breaking point. Some are just stronger than the others." I don't ever think that anyone that broke

37:00 earlier has any problems or anything to look back or be ashamed of than someone who took it 2 or 3 times. It's just everyone is a little bit different in their stress management area.

What do you miss about the army?

The comradeship. Especially when I was with 4 and 9 Battalion. It was like a big family.

37:30 You didn't have to go anywhere on your own. You never see that anywhere else. It's never anything like it in civilian life. If you didn't have any money left someone would have some money and lend you a couple of dollars to go to the movies or go out or go and have a beer or go to the football, whatever you wanted to do. There was such a diverse mix of

38:00 people that had come from all different backgrounds in life. Some of the national servicemen were so academically above me they should have been telling me what to do, not me telling them what to do. So you met all these kinds. Where we'd been out of contact for so many years there's that many guys trying to grab what's left of our life. So we do see one another and do have one another's support to lean on where

38:30 we were denied that. We were shipped in at the dark of night and shipped out by the dark of night as though there was something to be ashamed of. That was I suppose the worst part. Then we were split up everywhere so we didn't see anybody. Then, when a lot of us did ask for help, I mean, I always thought that, "Gee, you've really lost it. You drink too much. You've got too much of these psychological problems.

39:00 You've been in trouble with the police." Then when you find out there's other guys feel exactly the same as you, you think, "I can't be that bad then, because that guy's got the same problems as what I've got." There was never this ability to get together like now that most of us are retired, to talk about these things.

39:30 **What advice would you give to any future generations?**

Don't let the politicians do it to you. I think we've learned a lot. We're still gonna have international conflicts because that's just the way mankind is unfortunately. Religion comes into a lot of these conflicts. I haven't got too much time for religion. I've seen too much.

40:00 Some of these politicians. I've said the same thing a couple of times, but we need to be more aware of things around us. I think Australians are becoming more aware of how strong their vote can be. Where once one particular family always follows the Liberal Party, or one other side of the street followed the Labour Party. People don't do that anymore. There's more swinging voters. People are a lot more well educated with

40:30 the media available now. They can see things a lot quicker, get information quicker. Have got more reasoning power. I don't think anyone these days belong to a Labour movement or is a strong Labour person, or on the other side, anyone's a true Liberal. I think we've gotta think of being Australians and look at Australia rather than political parties. We have been used and are still being used by political parties.

41:00 Sometimes some veteran organisations are their worst enemies. I don't know whether you've had anyone else say that to you. The politicians are smart, so there's five different veterans' organisations. Just use that figure, 5. So they give number 1 a grant. Then they give number 4 a bigger grant than number 1. They give number 3 nothing. They give number

41:30 2 an in between grant for different things. So then all these organisations that start fighting one another. The pollies [politicians] reckon this is great. We are our worst enemy because we do not unite under one flag and become strong enough to be politically sway the politicians strongly because we are being suckered. We are our own worst enemy.

INTERVIEW ENDS