

Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald Workman (Ron) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1665>

Tape 1

- 00:42 **Take me through from where you were born and where you grew up continuing on from there.**
- I was born in Sydenham in NSW. Went to the Tempe school. Born in 1939. That was the start of the Second World War.
- 01:00 We grew up during the war and were fully aware of the contents of the war. We had thirteen in my mother's family. Three daughters and ten brothers. Some of them didn't come home. So we lived with our auntie and uncle through out that period up until the time I wanted to be a midshipman at twelve, and my academics were quite
- 01:30 extraordinary at the time. My mother wouldn't sign the documents, even though she and I weren't living together she did not want me to participate in the navy at the time. We didn't have enough money to go to Canterbury High School. That was where I was gonna do my leaving certificate. I might add John Howard went to that school at the same time. It's quite strange. So I stagnated at Tempe High School
- 02:00 until the age of fifteen. It was a stagnation period because academically I should have been somewhere else. Then in the interim, on our school holidays, I worked in the town rink. That held me in good stead for when I went to Vietnam. So I put in to join the air force at fifteen. Air force apprenticeship scheme. That was in 1954.
- 02:30 I'd completed the intermediate certificate and I got the interview, done the IQ [intelligence quotient] tests and I turned up for the main interview with a gladstone bag full of clothes. Strange as it may seem, the boxing officer was our education officer as life unfolded. He was in the interview process and the six-man interview board. After it was all
- 03:00 completed they asked me "We're curious of what you've got in the bag." I said, "I've come to join the air force. I'm going to join the air force now." They said, "It's not that easy." Then they explained to me the intake didn't start till January and I think this was about October. I said, "I cant' wait that long." They said, "Leave it to us. We've gotta interview the rest of Australia."
- 03:30 This was in New South Wales, Rushcutters Bay at the time. I went home with my tail between my legs and my gladstone bag. My auntie and uncle copped it on the chin. I suppose and I just had to leave home. 'Cause it wasn't a nice environment. So come December I got the notification that I was being inducted and so I joined the air force
- 04:00 in January 55 and some great guys were in the same dog box train that we went to Wagga. The institute up in Wagga, Forest Hill. It turned out in life, those guys in that dog box in that point in time all served in Vietnam. Strange as it may seem.
- 04:30 We went through the apprenticeship scheme, I graduated and played rugby league in Wagga. The first time the air force beat the junior Wagga team. We were a part of that, much to my darling wife's disappointment. She was barracking for the Legionnaires. I met my wife, Marge, about three weeks before I graduated. So my posting
- 05:00 came and I went to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base at Richmond. I was in the depot, then on to 486 maintenance where we worked on Dakotas, DC3, Hercules aircraft and the A- model Herc had just arrived. So we had numerous postings in that period, in ARDU, that's Air Force Research and Development Unit. So
- 05:30 we worked on the Meteor, the Canberra, the Vampire, the Sabre, all those jet aircraft that were around at that time. Then back basically on Neptunes, Hercules and Dakotas. So having gone through all that phase I wanted to move into Caribou season where the Caribou was mooted as a replacement of the Dakota.
- 06:00 I put in my application. There was a bit of resistance for me to get anywhere. Maybe because I was in the rugby league arena and I looked like being something. So any application I put in was slightly

pushed to one side, which was a bit disappointing. The course did commence

- 06:30 in '64. I was successful. I topped this course because I wanted to prove a point. From there we went to Canada on the 6 Ferry Flight, where we flew the aircraft around the world to bring it back into southeast Asia via Cocos Island, through the Bay of Bengal, basically around the world. Cocos Island, then back home.
- 07:00 I then repositioned the aircraft at Richmond. I caught a DC6 down to Wagga to see Marge. That's where Marge was with the children. Then I got the telegram that I was going to Vietnam. So the Vietnam era had just started for the Australian Caribou flight, RAAF transport flight, Vietnam.
- 07:30 So I was in the first replacement aircrew team that went over there. We done our tour of duty, returned and on return I took up, I was chief instructor of all aircrew, ground crew of a technical prior to departure to Vietnam. That encompassed and embraced Papua New Guinea also, training in Papua New Guinea. All aircrew had to
- 08:00 do Papua New Guinea prior to their going to Vietnam. Papua New Guinea was a very, very, apart from Brazil, probably the roughest country in the world. There are some statistics there that really enlightening, where as a training ground, anyone that survived Papua New Guinea really could handle Vietnam, the terrain in Vietnam, without any problems. 'Cause the
- 08:30 weather pattern was very similar. Thereafter I moved back onto Hercules in 36 Squadron. I did make application for a flight engineer. My CO, commanding officer, who I flew with in Vietnam, who has just passed away, he insisted on not one, but three occasions that I nominate for officer school. At that time
- 09:00 I was going places in rugby league so the posting would have impacted on rugby league and that was the first time we were making a bit of money out of the game. I had three jobs. Serving beer at the races, rugby league and the air force. So we'd do nav-exes [navigation exercises], stepping back a bit, this is one week for Ron Workman. We'd
- 09:30 take off on the Monday morning, we'd fly around the Tasman, land at Hobart, overnight Hobart. Take off the next morning, fly around the Tasman, get to the airbase at Richmond. Pick up my bags, go home, pick up another bag, go football training. Kiss the kids on the way through. Come back, the kids were in bed. Have dinner. Get up the next morning, take off, fly around the Tasman,
- 10:00 overnight Hobart. Next morning, take off, fly around the Tasman, come home, pick my bags up, kiss Marge goodbye, go to football training. Friday was paperwork and training and whatever at the air force. Sunday we'd go and have a game of football. In Penrith in those days we won a few and lost a lot. We were a new club in a very big game, football arena.
- 10:30 So then come 1970 I was appointed captain of the Penrith club and it was a very strange year that possibly Marge and I reacted to the fact in hindsight that I made the wrong decision. So I pursued a rugby league career where I possibly should have pursued the air force career further. I just could not accept at that point in time in
- 11:00 1970 that we had to sign on for another 10 years. Normally 20 years was retirement age. To sign on for another 10 years I just could not accept that. So I opted for discharge. 6 months after that they reduced that sign on period for 5 years. It broke our hearts. That's what happened. From there onwards I
- 11:30 started going to re-educate myself in economics and whatever. I took on a position as North Queensland manager for PGH [CSR-PGH bricks]. I was also coaching up there. I was doing my union up there. I captained North Queensland against Great Britain. I was too darn old, I was 35 1/2. It's ridiculous especially playing against Great Britain. But we won the competition up
- 12:00 there. It was a very unique enjoyable year for me personally. So I came back and took on a job at the Penrith Leagues Club, having played with Penrith from 1967 through to 73. Chalked up a lot of rugby league with Penrith and came back as their manager, the secretary of the rugby league side and assistant manager of the Leagues Club Limited. Two portfolios, quite demanding. Also I was appointed to the
- 12:30 New South Wales rugby league executive. I was probably the youngest executive in the history of the game to be appointed there. Kevin Humphries was the chairman of the rugby league at that point in time. I had the pleasure of going to America with the Oakland Raiders and I studied their trademarks of the National Football League in America. I brought that home and sat all the people who were making money off rugby league, the game,
- 13:00 and I, with a gentleman by the name of Hugh Hodgkins, in Kent Street in Sydney. We packaged the Australian rugby league trademarks and royalties. Probably in hindsight you know the cheer squadron, I introduced that into Australia. This little black duck sitting here.
- 13:30 I created some tremendous initiative. A lot of people said I was ten years before my time and I probably was. There was a few frustrations there that with an inbred rugby league bureaucracy, which I couldn't handle. The old boy's club. So I captured one of the chairmen of Australian rugby league, one of the selectors,

- 14:00 and I said, "Why didn't you ever give me a game in the Australian side?" He said, "Ronnie, you beat the best. You beat everyone that played for Australia. But you were told what club to go to and you didn't go to it." I said, "I was in the air force. For me to get to St George or to South Sydney, I'd be getting home at 2 o'clock in the morning on the train." I didn't have a car those days. So that was another moment in time.
- 14:30 We left Penrith League Club and as a family we moved to Queensland, came back, we went into private business. We had two garages and our own marine electrics. We had everything. Our son done his apprenticeship with me and that was a challenge. Delightful man. Takes after his mother. He's a gentle person,
- 15:00 but the other son takes after me. I'm not that gentle. We enjoyed that period. We relocated the business down to the Gold Coast. Then we moved out of that and the next thing I became an alderman for the city council in town planning, health and the cultural centre that you see
- 15:30 there now. That's a part of the decisions made against a very hostile community. When you look at the community centre now and go there it's a magnificent structure and used every day of the week. So the decision against hardship was the right one. Then I was made chairman of the bicentenary committee and we done a few things that were quite unique on
- 16:00 the Gold Coast. Then the whole town planning committee, in the early days of '82 to '85 that didn't, the entrepreneurs didn't like. So the whole town planning committee got voted out. That's another moment in time. I was knocked over on the seventh preferential count. I was very close.
- 16:30 Then Jupiter's casino, having worked in gaming and Penrith League's Club, were cranking up. So I was appointed to the Jupiter's Casino pre-opening management team. I wrote all their procedures, trained all their staff in gaming, video gaming and internal procedures, which had to be accepted by the Casino
- 17:00 Control Division. That was an era I enjoyed and began working for the American casino industry and it was very demanding. Gaming was muted in the state of Queensland. In 1989 to 1990 I was given an offer too good to refuse and
- 17:30 Jupiters was basically restructuring anyway, so the offer too good to refuse doubled my salary and so I took over as state manager for Aristocrat Leisure and I basically introduced, through the legislative process, gaming into Queensland, for which we got the major share of gaming and machine allocations. Then I looked after Northern Territory. Ended up in gaming in the Northern Territory
- 18:00 legislative wise and generally got the major share there. Then I introduced gaming into Papua New Guinea and that was an exercise in human nature apart from Vietnam. You'd never realise the capabilities of the politicians in Papua New Guinea. All in all it was a very interesting moment in time. Then I retired, but along the way
- 18:30 I was president of the Gold Coast Vietnam Veterans' Association. They gave me the association in a shoebox outside Caroming RSL [Returned and Services League]. There was a lot of things happening in those days. There was a lot of issues that weren't being addressed from assistance given to veterans. Going back two steps in time, when I was an alderman, the Royal Commission
- 19:00 on agent orange (UNCLEAR) cranked up. They held the actual interviews in the council chambers at the Gold Coast city council. Somehow or other I was dragged into that. I told them that "We started Ranch Hand." Ranch Hand was started in 1962. Ranch Hand was a defoliation program in the Central Highlands to start with of
- 19:30 Vietnam. March, May '65 we were participants in the leaflet program prior to the defoliation program commencing. That was another high wire act, which we'll talk about later on. So these guys didn't believe agent orange was in existence. This lawyer looked at me and said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Well, why would I create something just to satisfy you?"
- 20:00 He said, "Would you like to come to Sydney?" And I said, "Why not? It's about time the truth is told. You guys need to be told the truth because it did happen. The worst thing about it with you guys, when the pesticide runs are done they use the same aircraft for the defoliation, the same bins. So when the pesticide run was being done you'd have a residual component
- 20:30 of agent orange in there and they'd be spraying the whole Australian, or whatever they were, camps that needed eradication of insects and mosquitoes. Believe it or not, that was a standard occupational hazard." He said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not bloody kidding." He sent me to a shrink. I walk into the shrink and he's got thirteen pencils in his
- 21:00 top pocket like phallic symbols. I ended up cracking up laughing at him and I said, "Mate, you're sillier than I am and I got up and walked out." He gave me a percentage, he reckoned I was an absolute lunatic. I said "OK." So I got up and walked out. I never heard from the Royal Commission again. Coming back to the early 90's, there was a
- 21:30 problem, so I called upon a good old mate of mine, Keith Payne, VC, Victoria Cross recipient, and we held the largest gathering of Vietnam veterans in the history of this place. Keith is to this point in time a very close friend. They were staying here with us last week. So we started looking after veterans and

educating ourselves and our welfare officers. We lost three along the way and

22:00 one was my welfare officer, he did commit suicide. Marge and I were taking him fishing the next week and I was on my way to Brisbane to Aristocrat and he took a massive overdose. We came back and put him in a bag and we went from there onwards.

22:30 From there onwards I basically made up my mind that

23:00 something had to be done. So it was done. So we cranked ourselves up and educated ourselves and looked after veterans in a very constructive way. I ended up becoming president of Currumbin RSL. We

23:30 put in a team of people from tribunal all the way down, one was a lawyer, Vietnam veteran, the rest were pretty capable, knowledgeable men. Willing to stand up and challenge the systems that were in place at that point. Also ensure that our people, the veterans, really understood the requirements in

24:00 legislation so they can prepare themselves to challenge the legislation. That started in 1997 to '98. At the same time we, having been with Jupiter's and looking at the transient population of our youth and whatever, in parallel

24:30 to this we started a college of hospitality. The college of hospitality had to be accredited with all governments. Basically we started with Queensland. Then we went to New South Wales and so we got a national accreditation. To this point in time we're the only nationally accredited RSL as a college

25:00 of hospitality. Grooming our youth in the hospitality industry and management, junior management and whatever. We're pretty proud of that. From that, getting back to our support centre, we have something like 18 people there, volunteers that all have to participate in the requirements in legislation and all have to participate annually in the appropriate courses to bring them to a level of understanding of what the year 2004

25:30 is going to unfold in any aspects of the tribunal process. So we still have that institution. I've been president of the RSL now for ten years, of the sub branch. Chairman of the board for eleven years of the memorial club. That's a financial

26:00 arm of the RSL, the business and gaming machines. We're quite pleased and a very successful operation. Apart from that, after this interview, Marge and I, after Anzac Day, we're going camping in our caravan. Apart from that I'm also vice president of our surf club. I've kept that quiet from Marge because she thought I had enough on my hands.

26:30 I row surfboats as a master. The OAM [Order of Australia Medal] was bestowed on us on the 15th of April 2004 at Government House the day after our World War II luncheon that I was telling you about. So we

27:00 tried to go up to Government House without a hangover. That was a nice bestowal. The whole family were up there and it was quite a special moment. Very special. That's who you're talking to. Sorry about old Windy. Windy was the gentleman after the third

27:30 suicide. Windy took everything as my welfare officer, Keith Windbag. He was in Tranh Bong. He was my welfare officer and he took things very seriously with the problems of veterans. I should have known better because I signed his will about the week before and he was living in the caravan and he was

28:00 gonna do that right. A lot of people don't realise what happens to a person when they do take an overdose. The major point of impact is the blood vessels in the face. So Windy got into his pyjamas and was going to lay on his bed in the caravan and just slowly

28:30 go away. Pass away. That didn't happen. He hid all the tablets, the bugger, I couldn't find them. We didn't know how many he took. It was something in excess of fifty tablets. It hit him that hard all he could do was he fell on his knees and then fell across the bed. So he was a figure Z. That was where we found him. There's

29:00 a story to this. One soldier went in and looked. He bolted. So I came in and I took Windy's watch and necklace off and his ring and I put that in an envelope and then I tried to straighten him out. Rigor mortis had set in so I straightened him out and put him in, there's two young policemen there. I put him in the body bag. "God bless you, Windy." And poor

29:30 young policemen, that was their first encounter with death, which was quite sad. They were dry retching. I said, "Go outside. I'll look after it." So we put Windy in the bag. The next minute the young policeman comes in and he said, "You've gotta put him back to where he was." I said, "Who's requesting this?" He said, "The sergeant at Broadbeach police station." I said, "OK.

30:00 Is he on the radio?" He said, "Yeah." So I walked out and I gave this guy a job full. I gave him the greatest serve on Earth. I said, "I can just visualise you. You're sitting on your fat ass, you've got a fat gut and you're dictating to young kids and you should know better, sergeant. To bring those kids out here, un-chaperoned, you're a bloody disgrace and I'll be talking to the inspector about it." He said, "I'll get you." I said, "No, no. I'll get

- 30:30 you first. I'll go and see you." So he said, "Put him back, I've got photographers coming in." That's understandable. So I bring Windy back in. I unzipped him. I gracefully laid him on his bed where he wanted to be. I put the pillow up nice and I said, "Take your photographs." I winked at the young policeman and said, "Are you happy with that?" He said, "I certainly am, sir. Thank you." So we took the photographs,
- 31:00 put Windy away and we got the sergeant in a roundabout way. He was relocated and I say it's the best thing for the Gold Coast. That's the end of the story. That's all I have to say, Naomi. That's a big mouthful. There's a lot of gaps there too, I can tell you. Don't mind me for breaking up. Old Windy
- 31:30 accepted the challenge and Snow Rogers, the other guy, he was the brother to Steve Rogers, international rugby league player and the manager of Cronulla right now. So when Snow went away they knocked on my door here and Snow, we just got him out of Greenslopes rehab and he was down the RSL and I bought him a beer. A light beer.
- 32:00 I said, "Mate, keep clean." He said, "Worko, I am." So next morning the fishermen club from Currumbin RSL knocked on the door and said, "You'd better go out and put Snow away." So those days he was living with an aboriginal lady who was a very nice lady. The kids were absolutely dreadful bloody kids. So they threw Snow out of the house
- 32:30 and they threw him his packet of Marlboro, a pillow and that's where I found him near the outside barbeque with a half dozen stubbies and all of his Mogadon, Rohypnol, so he swallowed the bloody lot. I didn't highlight the blood vessels in a person's face when they do take an
- 33:00 overdose. They should show every kid that when they start popping pills, what it does to them. So Snow's face was just like Windy's, just as bad. Blown up like the size of a football. I immediately declared the body un-viewable, same as Windy, and that hurt because Snow was out in the bloody cold and so the detectives
- 33:30 stepped away from it, so we put him away. His mother and father were very nice people. Lovely people. Steve, the old Sludge, we played against each other back in the old days. He played with Cronulla and I played with Penrith and Sludge insisted we go back and get the medals, Snow's medals. He actually tore the place apart. I didn't
- 34:00 realise Steve was that big until I tried to stop him. I'm pretty solid and Sludge was there for a reason. We couldn't find the medals, so when I went to Paris for the fiftieth anniversary of the armistice of World War I, I said, "Take mine," so I had two sets. So I gave him a set and I haven't got them back yet. I don't know where they are. Sludge, or
- 34:30 his father Don used them. Don passed away and I don't know where the medals are, quite frankly. That's it, Naomi. That's about it. The good, the bad and the ugly. Oh, yes there is. The other silly things I'm involved in. State RSL, I'm chairman of the lease and loans committee, that's looking at all RSLs in Queensland, and looking at their viability and their borrowings and all that
- 35:00 sort of stuff. I'm chairman of the boundaries committee in Queensland. We slice up the whole state into appropriate districts and they become districts for all other RSLs. That's it.
- We'll talk more about your involvement with Vietnam veterans 'cause that's really fascinating.**
- 35:30 Yeah, it is. It's an ongoing one too. I think more so now with a lot of widows in need. A lot of widows are ignorant. The most disappointing discovery of it all is that what did not happen and what the RSL did not do in the years after the war
- 36:00 where a lot of World War II veterans could have been well catered for and looked after. There was no education process in there at all to challenge the legislative issues and God bless them all. They're all mates. They're all volunteers. So the volunteer process creates inadequacy in the challenge process.
- 36:30 God bless those guys, they were just cut to pieces when they went to Veterans Affairs with issues like that. Until the Vietnam war came along and there were some quite astute Vietnam veterans amongst the pack. That was then and only then did you see an education process, which is quite astounding that you saw so many of our World War II veterans getting
- 37:00 recognition for their war efforts and their injuries they sustained in their war effort. It was the Vietnam veterans that picked up the torch and done that. Still ongoing to this point in time. What you see at Currumbin is recognised state-wide as one of the finest support centres there is. I mean it, not because I'm a part of it, I prefer
- 37:30 not to be a part of it. I'm just president of the club. That is a sub structure. It's a cost centre of our sub branch. It costs us money to allow that to happen. I believe if we as an RSL can't get involved with a cost centre that pursues the veterans' welfare, mate, you're not an RSL bootlace. Full stop, I mean it. That's why we have the World War II Luncheon. If you can't look
- 38:00 after a veteran and see them all gather and enjoy each other's company, you're not an RSL bootlace. So there's a lot of RSL bootlaces around. I really mean it. What you see is really unique. That's why I

mention our dawn service and that. You never see it anywhere else in the country. And the mid-day service. You never see anything like it. So we video it and DVD it and (UNCLEAR).

38:30 That's about it.

When did your involvement with the Vietnam veterans...

It was when I was in Jupiter's casino. God bless Jupiter's casino, we used to launder all the mail to all the veterans through Jupiter's casino post box. It would have cost an arm and a leg. We had no money, so every now and then Jupiter's casino got "Address unknown" come back.

39:00 So they gave me all the letters. It got a bit embarrassing in the end. They had enough money than you can poke a dog at, Jupiter's. It's just one of my little annexes to the business operation of Jupiter's casino. I'll deny it. Honestly that's the way you did things in those days. Out of it all the need was so great

39:30 there's now two Vietnam Veterans' Associations on the Gold Coast. One up in Southport and one down at Coolangatta-Tweed. So we done the right thing. We've made a few mistakes along the way, but now, we done the right thing.

Tape 2

00:37 **What are your earliest memories of World War II?**

My earliest memory of World War II was the air raids that were quite frequent. Both my brother and my auntie and uncle underneath the table in the laundry.

01:00 They were quite frequent. There was a drill we were told to adopt. I can remember that. I must have had a pretty alert mind in those days, but they were graphic experiences and I can remember that.

Do you remember what you thought about Australia at war, or about the Japanese?

That particular thought

01:30 in my mind in those days was that we were the goodies and they were the baddies. They were trying to take Australia and they weren't that far off from being successful. If it hadn't been for the Australians in Papua New Guinea and Milne Bay. That was the first time the Japanese had ever been defeated as a land army. I'm proud to say I've got

02:00 a few of those young men in the RSL who were in Milne Bay.

Do you remember playing games?

Yes. Used to play cricket in the street. Play football. Forcings back in the street. Living with my aunties and uncle my uncle was a bricklayer, a pretty wild man. My auntie worked in the knitting mills for the war effort.

02:30 When they finished work they'd stay at the pub. Wouldn't come home until the six o'clock swill had finished and we, in the middle of playing cricket and football, we'd cook tea. Every now and then we used to burn some too. There was a mad scurry to clean the potato pot out and get the smell of burnt potatoes out of the house. That was our life. That was

03:00 every day. My uncle was a fairly ruthless man. He certainly taught me how to fight. It was a bit of domestic violence there. I'll never forget my auntie, probably Thursday and Friday nights would be the worst. He'd come home with a blistering temper and so

03:30 I used to have the windows open. I used to jump out one window and my brother would jump out the other window and Auntie Mopsy would run out the front door. We all had our little hiding places in St Peters. I can never forget my aunty. How she got there, I don't know. She beat me to my hiding place. She was crouched there and all she said was, "Piss off! This is my hiding place. Go and find another one." I ended up on top of the semi-detached houses on the crown of the roof.

04:00 That was my way of getting away. That was part of life.

Is there any reason he was so violent?

I don't know. I think he would have liked to have his own children. My father was in the air force and he was gone. My mother was Australian jitterbug champion at the time, so her declaration of us was that we were her brothers. So that allowed her more

04:30 flexibility and freedom in those times. She used to dance at the Trocadero back in George Street. She was a very good dancer. Australian champion; you'd have to be pretty good. She used to jitterbug for the Americans. Then we came through a period of, I had three phobias. One was

- 05:00 trains. I used to have a collection of photographs of all the trains in the world and every aircraft in the world. Plus pigeons. We raised pigeons. So my uncles and myself used to raise the pigeons. The terminology "tossing them". I used to get up at five in the morning. I wasn't that big in those days.
- 05:30 I was the second smallest in a squadron of 126. I was five-foot-one-and-a-half in the old days, and seven-stone-three, because I played seven-seven state side rugby league. To carry a pigeon box to the railway station was certainly a feat. Then I'd go to the electric train end of the line. I told the guard "Wait." So I raced up to the end of the platform
- 06:00 and let the pigeons go, raced back, catch the train home and my uncle in the interim would have got the birds in, he would have fed them. I'd get home and clean the pigeon cage out. I'd do the housework and go to school. The you come home, do your homework and play cricket, burn the potatoes and
- 06:30 hope we weren't gonna get caught. That was life till I joined the air force. I had three paper runs too. That put some money in the bank. On school holidays I worked in the tanneries. I was their lunch boy cum cleaning out the backs of the machines.
- 07:00 So that did hold me in good for Vietnam. I was used to that. Then come the time, I read an ad in the paper with my brother. God bless Donnie, he got meningitis and that was a kiss of death from an induction point of view medically. So we parted. Don stayed at home and I
- 07:30 joined the air force with my gladstone bag.

Did you see your mum on many occasions as you were growing up?

To be honest, not really. She was there and she wasn't there. She was obviously preoccupied. I think the only time that my mother concentrated on our

- 08:00 whereabouts was when we were ready to leave school and were gonna earn some money, so she could probably take it off us. That's a pretty hard thing to say, but that's the truth. That's why when I said to join the midshipman, that's what hurt me most because I was ready to go and do the academic side of it and end up in, I think it was Cambridge University. I had a tremendous career path. I'd done
- 08:30 all the exams. Crazy.

Why do you think she had been like this?

I can't answer that. Hang on, I probably can. I think probably, remember there was thirteen in the family. One of them got accidentally killed playing with matches. I think my mother had the box of matches in her hand and she got the blame for it. So they,

- 09:00 in looking back on it I think probably yes, she was a brother and a sister, but I think they ostracised her a bit too back in those days. Plus we were getting a few knocked over in the war too. We lost a few. So that happened.

What had happened to your father?

He was in Darwin and Papua New Guinea. He came

- 09:30 back from there. We never saw him. He came back and then died. He died in 1970. The second time I saw him he arrived here for my 50th birthday. We had a photo taken out there in the
- 10:00 rose room there. Then even that, the fact that he was ill, there was no courtesy extended to myself or anyone else. His wife distanced, made a point of not letting us know until he passed away. I never saw him. So there were
- 10:30 a couple of cheap shots along the way. You don't know whether that was society in that era or not because it was a fairly, the post-war era was pretty hard. So whether that was a legacy of that, I can't answer that. I never saw my father. I remember him giving the air force a war book. That was in 1943.
- 11:00 The next time we saw him we went to the Royal Easter Show. I never saw him anymore.

He was in the air force?

Yeah.

Was his being in the air force any effect on your joining later?

I just wanted to join the air force. I don't believe so. I just

- 11:30 wanted to join the air force. They had all those collections of aircraft. To this day I still don't know what happened to them when I did join the air force. It was a tremendous collection.

What was life like growing up in St Peters?

You had to be a street fighter. We were the Elberdon Street Yellow Bellies. True words. There was little pockets of

12:00 gangs running around. More like leprechauns running around. But all the little leprechauns ended up playing in some very substantial rugby league sides. We all grew up. We had no football boots. We'd go down the park, especially when it rained, and tackled the hell out of each other. A lot of them played for Newtown, South Sydney, St George, New South Wales and Australia.

12:30 Quite incredible little area of people. That was that way you played your game. If you gave a hit in the eye don't whinge when you get one back. That was the game. That's what we were. It held me in good stead when I joined the air force too. They took no prisoners in there for the first couple of months.

13:00 **Do you remember the ad you saw with your brother?**

Yeah. It was a newspaper ad calling for young men from the age of fifteen onwards. You had to have your academics in the right place with some type of mechanical affability

13:30 and aptitude. It was appealing to me. I said, "That's me." That's why I turned up with my Gladstone bag. 'Cause I knew I could do it. I was adamant about that.

Tell us about your education.

I was at Tempe school. I'd done my intermediate well before I was fifteen. That started

14:00 from the day my mother threw us into school. Donnie started at five and I started at four. So I was a year younger all the way through school. I think I ended up going to high school at eleven because I ran the bull school's high school carnival as a young kid, juvenile. So academically I was right.

14:30 The most deflating moment, I'd reached the pinnacle of education where I wanted to learn more and I couldn't. So I stagnated. That was the most frustrating period of my life academically. It cost my brain a bit too. I just became very wayward.

15:00 I used to steal milk bottle money. Apart from having the paper runs, that's when I locked into my paper runs because I could see going to school was a waste of time. It was a waste of time at that time. It could have been just to buy a pair of darn shoes to go to high school. That was a critical aspect of it. We just didn't have the money.

15:30 **What had inspired you to get educated to that level?**

I had the thing in my mind, I couldn't see myself being in St Peters for the rest of my life. I refused to let it happen. I just had to get out 'cause I could see

16:00 what was gonna happen. I'd be in the brickyards, I'd be in the tannery. That's exactly what happened to my brother. He ended up being in the tannery and then the brickyards. That guy had a brilliant brain. It was quite sad. Apart from the meningitis that he got he'd sit at the back of the class and beat everyone in chess. He beat me.

16:30 He was just extraordinary. Still participate in the exams. I was very good at algebra and maths and physics. So that sort of rolled into the air force. Even though I was dormant in those couple of years. There was a dull period there that frustrated me. I just had to get out.

Did your aunt or uncle

17:00 **encourage you to study anything?**

No.

How did you self motivate to do it?

You get a hit in the ear every Thursday and Friday night and stand up for yourself and your auntie. You say "Hell." So I used to get my homework done in the morning, or I'd get it done before it all started, and

17:30 I just didn't wanna be a part of it. There was a couple of good motivators there. I just feel that when I looked at all the other guys that were around me there. They were going into the tanneries, the ordinary mundane employments, plus gaol. Quite a few of them went to gaol. To me

18:00 that was the lifeline which I grabbed with both hands.

Why did your uncle and aunt drink so much?

I think after the war the two of them drank themselves to death. Uncle Stinky, Uncle Ray, he drank himself to death. Uncle Ernie drank himself to death. Uncle Billy fell out of the train drunk. Lost his leg. He'd

18:30 been to the war. All the ruddy way through the war and fell out of the train drunk. For my auntie and uncle, it was a basic daily obligatory where they wouldn't come home till half-past six. We'd do all

19:00 the vegetables, do the cooking and we had everything precision-timed and we still had time to play cricket, homework and play forcings. We made a couple of mistakes. They were obsessive drinkers.

They weren't good drunks either. They were bad drunks. I've had a pumpkin sandwich thrown in my face. I didn't like pumpkin at the time. I'll eat anything now. Those days were

19:30 a daily event. You never forget where you come from. I certainly don't. So I'm so happy now with our family; we've got great children. They've been brought up in the military environment. Their children are exceptionally well behaved until they got involved with

20:00 grandpa. I seem to be the stimulant to create mayhem and I enjoy every second of it. We're proud of both Marge's side of it too. He was a Rat of Tobruk, Marge's father. We've been a military family, so we're happy with that. When I look at my brother's side, his family is catastrophic. So not only did the air force

20:30 do me a favour, I enjoyed it, it also allowed us to bring our children up in an environment where there was real-time life, real-time events and good grooming and youth. So we've had a pretty lucky moment.

Did your childhood make you grow up fast?

21:00 Well, when you can cook dinner for four at 7 years of age you grow up pretty fast. So when I got to the air force I was in the boxing side. Every night we got tipped out of bed. Whoever tipped me out of bed knew about it. So that'd happen about midnight. So in the end they didn't tip me out of bed.

21:30 I was only a leprechaun. I was a small person. But I had the ability, as a small person, to play Rugby Union and Rugby League with the senior squadron. That gave me a tremendous buffer, a saloon passage, where at that time it was absolutely unacceptable to have a junior squadron member in the senior team. So I had a

22:00 bit of an edge.

Tell us about receiving the news. You told us about turning up with a bag.

A gladstone bag. Everyone knows what a gladstone bag was in those days. It was an all-purpose bag. I borrowed it off my Auntie Dolly actually. She passed away with cancer. I borrowed it off her. I said, "I promise to bring it back." I used to take it to football. That was an in-thing.

22:30 I turned up there with my bag.

What's a gladstone bag?

It's an extraordinary, it's an all purpose bag with a couple of pockets on the inside. It was long. Just an ordinary bag, like that, similar. I turned up, it was in Rushcutters Bay. All the other kids were sitting there. They're looking at me with my bag.

23:00 I didn't say anything. I done all the aptitude tests and come in for the interview. Old Punchy Johnson, he ended up being our education officer, our boxing officer and our coach for rugby union. I can't recall the other interviewing officers. Right at the tail end he said, "We're OK, Mister Workman. We will

23:30 notify you. There's one last question we'd like to ask of you." I said, "Go right ahead." "What's the bag for?" I said, "I've come to join the air force. I'm ready join the air force right now. I've got my bag. It's got all my clothes in it and I'm going." They all started smiling and laughing and they said, "Well, with due respect,"

24:00 the chairman of the interview board, he said, "Mister Workman, we've gotta interview the rest of Australia. So please understand that will take some time." I said, "No, I can't be understanding. I've already said goodbye to my auntie and uncle and my brother." He said, "Well, would you mind going back home?" I said, "How long for?" He said, "Well, next January." So I said, "I do mind that."

24:30 It was as strange set of circumstances. I said, "What am I gonna tell my auntie and uncle?" He said, "We'll send you a letter one way or the other and advise you whether or not you've been successful." That was it.

What was it like to go back?

Shocking. I caught the train back to Sydenham and walked in the door. Same old ritual. Same old Thursday night and the same old Friday night.

25:00 So I left school then and I started work in the tannery right up till the time when I went in. Actually, when I looked at the induction, I was registered as a tannery hand when I got to Wagga. "What were you doing?" I said, "Tannery hand." It came up on the document.

25:30 So that's it.

What was it like to receive the letter?

Extraordinary. I think my brother Donnie then was disappointed. Donnie joined North Cronulla Surf Club and so we were cadets down there. We'd stay down there.

26:00 Isn't it amazing how one thing reminds you of another thing? To get away from the environment we'd go

down to North Cronulla surf club and sleep there from Friday night to Saturday night and come home on Sunday just to get away. We'd go down there and look after ourselves, which wasn't that hard. Swim, surf, have fun. Then I caught the train on the Monday.

26:30 **Was that half the reason, getting away from the home environment?**

Most certainly. No, I don't agree with you. I think the opportunity, I've always been taught to jump at an opportunity. The opportunity, one that I missed was the navy, and two was the air force and three the environment I was in.

27:00 I was gonna join the air force no matter what. The opportunity came completely platforming [?] the environment I was living in. I had to get out of that. I had to. It was just so timely and so beautiful that that did happen. Otherwise I'd have joined at seventeen or something. Then again, the risk of it being brought back down in society that you were existing in, that would have

27:30 been a motivating contributor to whether I joined the air force later on. I'm not sure. We were all going down the one road at that time.

Tell us about your first day when you got there.

We were in the train that left at seven-thirty from Central Station. To see the collection of

28:00 New South Welsh men, young men, was a little bit daunting because you didn't know where you were actually going. The furthest I'd ever been in my life at that point in time was to Molong in Orange with the scouts. So to go to Wagga Wagga, that was the trip all night. We froze.

28:30 We were all in the one dogbox. Terry Pinkham, he ended up on choppers. Buggy Rose, he ended up on Caribous. As life goes around that's where we were. We got out of the train at five-thirty in the morning. It was freezing cold even though it was summer. Marge my darling wife, being a Wagga girl, was totally used to it. So we

29:00 caught the bus to RSTT at Wagga Wagga; RAAF School of Technical Training. There we were fed. It was a long day that particular day. We were inducted and we had to swear allegiance to the Queen. Then

29:30 we were fitted out with our clothes, our bedding and allocated our huts. Bearing in mind there was young men from Queensland, Northern Territory, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and some New Zealanders and some Pakistanis come in. So we over-nighted. First

30:00 night I ended up nearly out the window, out of bed. Everyone went out of bed. That was the induction process of getting tipped out of bed by the senior squadron. The next night it was the second senior squadron. There was three squadrons. Senior, seconds and junior squadron. So it just went on and on. They'd picked up momentum come Friday night, Saturday night when the senior squadron

30:30 were allowed to drink. The middle squadron snuck away to drink. We weren't allowed to drink, 'cause we were only fifteen or something. There's a legendary hotel in North Wagga where junior squadron people did drink. To this day our family in-laws

31:00 live next-door to this particular hotel. It's called The Black Swan. We used to call it The Dirty Duck. We were in there this year's Australia Day. In that time we used to sneak across there and I'd had a beer before, but at the age of fifteen you get drunk on gin and tonic. You'll never forget it. Lemon squash. I was so ill it wasn't even

31:30 funny. I never touched a gin for decades. That was a part of the growing up process. That's about it.

Did they catch you with a hangover or anything like that?

No, not that time. They had their hands full with the senior squadron. The senior squadron were called Daffodils.

32:00 The second squadron was called Mangoes. What was I? I was a doughnut. I was soft, sickly and gutless as the inside of a doughnut. Don't know what a mango was. They were the second and the senior squadron Daffodils. So that was our year. We had some very capable gentlemen involved in that year. Barry Dale

32:30 was an extraordinary fighter. He ended up in our Rugby League time and a very close friend of mine. He failed to graduate. He had an IQ which was extraordinary. You know where he's living now? In a hut on a bend of the Murray River near Tail End Bend

33:00 in Victoria. But when he left the air force the army scooped him up and he had a tremendous brain. He came from Granville in Sydney. On my leave Barry and I would go to their place for other reasons which I've mentioned earlier. I'd never go home. So Barry and I'd go back to the Dales' place and we were close friends.

33:30 Barry, when he left the air force the army scooped him up. He was a linguist. He'd done Indonesian, Malay, Vietnamese. They inserted him into Vietnam. He went, he worked with indigenous people. He walked from one end of Vietnam to the other. Very good soldier. He was tough and hard and a good

knuckler, a good fighter.

How did you make

34:00 **mates with him?**

I don't know. We were both from the same background. We played football in the first year together. We stood up and got counted. Then we joined the boxing team together. It was just one of those

34:30 chemical things of understanding. He was hard and we played hard football together. It was sad to see him go quite honestly. 'Cause he had a tremendous potential.

When you started, how did the officers in charge instil discipline amongst young men?

You've gotta accept

35:00 the imagination of young men. They have an extraordinary imagination. No matter what the officers did, the extraordinary young imaginative boys would beat at everything they put up in front of them because there was tremendous ingenuity there. They were an extraordinary induction of brilliant brains. Some brilliant kids there. They possibly shouldn't have been there. They should have been somewhere else in the air force, naval

35:30 or army institution. That's proven to this day. To answer your question, yes, there was control. After hours it was quite hard for them to control our after-hours activities. We were pretty playful in those days. We'd certainly make a point of getting back at our drill instructors.

36:00 They'd never find out who it was, but I'll tell you what, they ended up out of bed more times than we did. Payback.

What methods did you use?

We'd wait till, we'd have the cockatoos and wait til the last lights. Then we'd wait. We put the alarm on about three in the morning, death of the night. Bang, out of bed. Gone.

36:30 All over and done with. A couple of little things we won't expand upon. It was payback.

What was it like with the other fifteen year olds?

It was fun. There were people there that didn't cut it, didn't make it. There was an attrition rate.

37:00 The word brotherhood is a late word these days. There was a brotherhood begin put in place. To this day we are all still in contact with each other. In that period we also, once we got through the first year and allocated our trade,

37:30 our mustering, we helped each other tremendously. So the four-man dorm, I was in aircraft engineering, there was three engineers, Graham Hardy was another one and Ian Muldoon was a gun plumber, an armourer. We all liked jazz. So Ian Muldoon, he lives down at Coffs Harbour now, I haven't

38:00 seen him since, but he sent me an e-mail. He had the jazz collection. So we'd study with jazz in the background. That was classic stuff. So we complimented each other and helped each other. There were a lot of us, maybe now and then we had problems. Propped each other up. We'd go to town. In the second year we could go into town once a week.

38:30 Then I was a congregation [Congregationalist] by way of religion, but I wasn't that religious. But somehow or other they came to me and said, "Would you prefer to go to the church in town in view of the churches here." I said, "I'll be able to take a trip into town? Why not?" So I'd be very blasphemous in accepting that,

39:00 but I'd go to town and go to church and walk around town and extended it to a greater extent. Next minute we got sprung. We were hitchhiking back to Wagga RSTT and we accepted a lift and it turned out to be the padre. So we copped that and severed our relationship with that church in town.

Tape 3

00:39 **Were you given much leave to go into Wagga?**

In the second year, yes. Fairly restricted in the first year. Although we didn't get day leave. So come the second year, yes, we got day leave, night leave and

01:00 day leave again on the Sunday. That's about it.

How did Wagga react to air force blokes?

In history Wagga has always been a military town right from World War II. Temora, Wagga, Irinquiddy

air base, Kapooka army base and

- 01:30 the air force. They've been there from time memorial. I think the only collision that did take place was there were some young buys from Wagga who weren't of the sporting ilk who were quite untasteful in their actions in a lot of ways.
- 02:00 Shanghaiing young air force kids or army, culling them out and giving them a flogging or a hiding. So we brought that to an end. I can still remember the guy's name. His name was Spider. We, as an air force group, and the army group made a point
- 02:30 of going to town one day and finding Spider. Spider got the flogging of his life. He had to pick on someone his own size, not isolating young kids out and flogging them to an inch of their death. Spider got his just rewards. From then we had a good co-existence with the town.
- 03:00 We played in every sport. Hockey, rugby union, rugby league, we swam and my darling wife played with the Rosella Reds in hockey with her two sisters. They won the comp. We had a fairly good relationship with town. The
- 03:30 day I met Marge we were in the process of finalising our lead up with revision for our final exams. I'd go to the dances of a Saturday night in the Coconut Grove and I'd admire this young lady from afar. Bearing in mind my mother was Australian jitterbug champion I couldn't dance a step. I was hopeless.
- 04:00 Marge and her girlfriends would pirouette over a dance floor like you'd ever, dancing with all the opposition footballers and all that. There was admiration there for quite some time. I had been good friends with some of the Wagga footballers and I ended up dancing with Shirley Murphy. She was the ugliest girl in the hall. She was the only girl that would dance with me.
- 04:30 She had a tremendous personality. She was a beautiful girl inside. Marge will confirm that. She was a lovely person. She taught me how to dance. As time goes by we had a blood-red Vauxhall coupe. Brian Greg owned it, but Bruce
- 05:00 went onto flight engineer. Brian Greg and myself saw the girls that we admired from afar down the Wagga beach. They were on their pushbikes. Somehow or other we found out where they lived. The moment of truth came when we drove up to Bolger Avenue and Marge and her mother were out
- 05:30 looking at the garden or something. My close, dear friends, put me out of the car and left me standing there and drove off. So I had no option. I was only a young man. So I introduced myself. Then I had to be introduced to Marge's father. He was a Rat of Tobruk. He was a lovely man,
- 06:00 but the first impact of our introduction was, well, he was a hard old nut. That came to a good conclusion. We had the chance to go to the pictures one night. We went to see "Tea at Tiffany's". What was the name of that? It was a good movie. What was the name of it?
- 06:30 "Affair To Remember". I just felt that natural with Marge. I had my blazer on and all the tough things that you put on to make a big image. I took my jacket off and I said, "Hang on to this, will you?" I just gave it to Marge automatically. I went and bought a packet of chewing gum or something. From then we were
- 07:00 quite comfortable with each other. We sent an invitation to Marge to be at the graduation because no one from my side were coming because of what you've heard in the past. I'd have liked to see my brother there, but that didn't happen. So Marge accepted the invitation for the graduation ceremony, which was quite nice. We had a lovely night.
- 07:30 Then I was posted down the airbase at Richmond. So every fortnight we'd get in the E.J. Holden and drive back to Wagga to see our girlfriends. Bruce Patterson, myself, Square Martin, he ended up flying with Hong Kong Air, Tiger or some darn thing. That's the way it was.

Was the occasion when the other blokes dropped you out

- 08:00 **of the car outside Marge's house the first formal introduction?**

Yeah.

- 08:30 Fancy writing a letter every night.

What things would you write in the letter?

Lord knows. It was quite incredible. So here we are now in 2004, forty-six years later. Long time.

The blazer

- 09:00 **you wore to the pictures, was this the fashion at the time?**

Everyone had a blazer in those days. If you could get a blazer you wore it. I think it was part of life. Everyone had a blazer.

What other things were trendy, popular culture-wise?

Bill Haley, rock and roll, Elvis. That was the era. That was the

09:30 start of what today's all about. We'd dance with each other. We'd have a player in the squadron and we'd put a record on and dance and learn to dance. Then when we'd go to the dances we were all about the same height and we'd all swap clothes so every Saturday night we went to town we had something different on.

10:00 We were all the same height. We'd all race around on the Saturday afternoon and "Can I get a shirt? No, I wore that last week." It was dim and dum. That was great.

You'd partner each other to practise?

Yeah, dancing, of course.

What type of dancing was it?

Rock and roll.

10:30 The next step from jitterbug. Jiving. That was it. I even found my mother at some stage. She taught me a few steps. She was pretty cool. As an old lady she could still boogie. And I mean boogie. She could dance.

11:00 What were the ultimate fashion items?

Ivy League, Miller's shoes, pointed toes, Mitchell Blue, Peg Legs, it was all in. Ivy League.

Were there different groups defined by what they wore?

No. There was the

11:30 old-fashioned that didn't participate, but everyone tried to be a part of that era. Check trousers, speckled trousers. That was it. A Guy Mitchell Blues, extraordinary colours.

What would be Guy Mitchell Blue?

12:00 You know the blue I had on in the shirt? That's a Guy Mitchell Blue.

Would you wear a shirt that colour?

Absolutely.

Were there elaborate hairstyles involved?

Yes, there was the Elvis Presley haircut. But being in the air force that was unavailable. People used to try and hide it and leave

12:30 their hats. That was it.

Were there any repercussions for what you did to Spider?

No. Actually the town was happy it happened. I never knew whatever happened to Spider. Gee, he got a hiding. And his mates.

13:00 Was there any tensions between air force and army?

Of course there was. You've got no idea how much there was. Especially at the dance. That'd happen.

Which group was more popular with the ladies?

I'd like to say the air force. The army. I really don't know. A lot of air force

13:30 personnel married Wagga people. And quite a few army people married Wagga girls. If fights happened it was a fight. Then you help the guy up if you knock him down, have a beer and that was it, all over and done with. A fight's a fight. If there's a disagreement. Not like today. A guy

14:00 goes down they kick the hell out of him. In those days, it's all over, finished.

What would spark an argument between army and air force?

People were having a few beers and turning up at a dancehall at nine o'clock and chemical reactions. Jostling for dancing with a lady or something like that. Then something

14:30 would happen. It didn't worry me. All I did was dance with Shirley Murphy. She was a great girl.

How were the dances structured? Were they dry?

Oh yeah. Dry dance.

- 15:00 Absolutely no grog inside. So you had a bellyful before you got in there. In those days you were quite restricted because there were service policemen and MPs [military police]. You'd find that from our point of view we'd be active during the day playing sport, Saturday afternoon competitions and
- 15:30 we'd probably go home. So you had a great day and we'd come back and have a couple of beers at the hotel where the opposition would drink. We'd have a few beers there. It was a lifelong friendship struck there with some of those guys. All good fellows. Then we'd go in the dance together. We'd always make a point of being there before nine because ten o'clock they wouldn't let you in anyway. 'cause they
- 16:00 knew you'd been drinking. So we went half smug. We were trying to be smug.

What other things would you do on a date?

Go to the movies. Go to Wagga Wagga beach.

- 16:30 That's pull it right up. Go to the movies, dance or the beach. That's it. I can't think of anything else. There was no such thing as nightclubs.

In your first years of training, what would you hear about communism

- 17:00 **and things happening in the world?**

It's a good question. The process of association of world events would be basically through movies and the newsreels at that point in time. The other component of it was that we'd have allocated

- 17:30 one session during the week to watching World War II historic true cuts of events that occurred in World War II. So that gave us a basic understanding of world events. World atrocities in World War II. The newsreels, we'd always

- 18:00 make a point of going to the movies on the base. That was part of the package of entertainment was newsreels from all over the world.

What would you hear about communism?

Whatever was going down at that point in time. There was no indoctrination process. There was just laidback movies and newsreels.

- 18:30 **These World War II snippets they showed you, what focus would they have?**

It was quite balanced. Because it wasn't a one-way process. It showed

- 19:00 the free world getting involved. It'd showed the enemy getting involved in issues that were considered part of war.

Would there be a focus towards air force?

No. army, navy, air force, the whole lot. Just general.

Looking back, what do you think was the purpose of this sort of education?

- 19:30 Apart from the obvious, I think it gave you by way of your enlistment, a good grooming and a platform of what can happen, what has happened. And the understanding that if you had to become part of any type of conflict that you were aware that's what you could be apart of something that will happen.

- 20:00 That's fair enough.

Was there information given about the Korean War?

Yeah.

What?

My cousin was in the Korean War. He didn't even land. He was on one of the barges and he got stung in the shoulder and ended up on the drink when he got in. Poor old Trevor. He was never the same since. The Korean War was

- 20:30 quite interesting because it was the Forgotten War. On the plaque down the RSL I've mentioned that it's a Forgotten War and the Frozen Chosen, the Land of the Morning Calm. What the Australians did then was quite extraordinary.

Were you educated about the changes that had come in

- 21:00 **in the air force around that time in terms of aircraft?**

The Meteor was working on. The Mustangs with the Packard motors in it. Sabre Jets with the A1 motors in it. I graduated on those motors. A Rolls Royce Merlin motor was in the meat box, the Meteor. That was our

21:30 training.

Why was it called a meat box?

It was a meat box. I don't know why. It was an obnoxious thing to work on. With the Sabre A1 motor you can just lift panels off and straight access. The meat box, probably did look like a meat box, the fuselage. It didn't really. It was a quite long motor and really hard to access and do

22:00 running adjustments and whatever.

Which one was better, the Meteor or the Sabre?

The Sabre was a better aircraft. It was a new generation.

What were the main differences between them?

The Meteor had two motors. It was quite an agile aircraft. The Sabre would get up to close to the speed of sound. It was a massive A1 motor.

22:30 A massive motor. One of our guys that we graduated with, Herbie Finscham, he was an airframe fitter and posted to Williamtown where the Sabres were. On the shutdown sequence the pilot was required to go to full throttle and then fuel off and then that takes all the fuel out of the

23:00 motor. But the actual sequence of events also required the ground engineer to put the chocks in the nose-wheel. So poor Herbie walked up with the chocks with the intent of chocking the nose-wheel and he's gone to full throttle and sucked him down the mouth of the Sabre and killed him. That was our first death in our squadron.

23:30 Pretty gruesome death.

How would that happen?

It wasn't a human error, it was a procedural error. The procedures were changed thereafter. Sorry for changing the subject with the Korean War. That's an actual event.

Was the Sabre a British or American

American.

24:00 **Did changing from the Meteor to the Sabre represent a great shift in the air force from British to American?**

I'm quite sure the Commonwealth aircraft factory started building the Sabres in Australia. So the transition there was a basic transition into the Sabre. That was

24:30 76 and 77 Squadron. Don't hold me to it. I'm just a transport aircraft man.

In your second year of training, when you mustered, how did they begin your trade training?

Go back to the first year. You were taught

25:00 all aspects of machinery, fitting and turning and very, very articulate filing and making of models to plus or minus three-thousandth or one-thousandth of an inch. You had to be very particular. Second year was basic introduction to aircraft engines, aircraft

25:30 engineering, theory of flight. Then you done one engine at a time and the first engine would be the Gypsy Major that goes into a Tiger Moth. That's an inverted motor so the sump is on the top and the cylinders are down the bottom. That was your first

26:00 orientation to engines. Then you went into motors of the era. That was a single-row Wasp. That's a radial engine. Then you went into the twin-row Wasp, which is a radial engine. Then you went into Rolls Royce Merlin, which is a V12 in-line beautiful motor. Strong bird calibration. Then you

26:30 went into your jet theory, jet principles, turbine theory. So your soft introduction to jet theory would be the Nene, the Vampire. That's one I forgot to tell you, the Vampire, which is a Nene motor. Then the Merlin in the meat box,

27:00 in the Meteor, the Avon in the Sabre and so on through the Canberra and then your gas turbine prop-driven motors. So it was all packaged well and current with technology at that time.

Were there any

27:30 **radial engines still in use?**

Yeah, in Goony Bird, the DC3. I know every nut and bolt on the darn thing. The propeller. So it was a natural transition from graduation to something you knew a hell of a lot about. So we didn't see any drama of that type of

28:00 next step into the operational aspect of the aircraft. The DC3. The most beautiful aspect of it was that

the twin-row Wasp in the DC3 was an eighteen-thirty [the R-1830 series of engines]. The next step into the Caribou was a Pratt [Pratt & Whitney] 2,000, a motor with a bit more grunt. The same principles, which we knew a hell of a lot about.

28:30 Then we went into the Hercules motor, the Alisons. That required schooling at RAAF Richmond. The A model Allison motors. And the Hamilton propeller system and the E models that arrived thereafter required special schooling on those particular Lockheed Hercules aircraft. D model, different motor, a bit more grunt.

29:00 And the propeller, the Hamilton propeller was much more sophisticated. So the generation there was appropriate for us to be a part of. So we were pretty good at what we did.

What are the main differences of working on radial engines and in-line engines?

The radials,

29:30 there'd be all prone to oil leaks. The in-line were a beautiful motor, but a complicated motor. For rigging. I'm talking about the Rolls Royce Merlin now, the V12. It's a much more complex motor. Much more powerful

30:00 motor. The calibration system and the turbo principle stuck into the rear end of it. You had to have all your ducks in a row in your calibrations as such. Bear in mind the Pratt and Whitney was a good motor to work on. So I don't believe I had any problems with either. They're two different principles. Obviously the V12

30:30 was much longer. The radials were much more compact. You still had to work on them. The cowling system was a lot different. That in time in the equation could add to your day depending on where you were. If you were in Vietnam and you had the cauliflower cowls, the cowl open up, that was OK. It was reasonable OK. There's a couple of funny stories there.

31:00 **In Vietnam?**

Yeah. Remind me to tell you about my CO. Down at Hoi An.

In the radial engines in comparison with the in-lines, they were in DC3s.

Yeah. The Single-row Wasp was in the windshield. The other one was in the Wirraway,

31:30 the single-row Wasp also. Then the twin-row Wasp was in the DC3. Sorry for interrupting you.

Were radial engines used in specific aircraft because they were more compatible or gave more power to a larger aircraft?

No, that was what was available at the time. When you read some of the statistics on World War II, boy, we were very thin in the air.

32:00 Very thin. That was only the tail end of World War II that the Mustangs, and the Kittyhawk was there also. That performed well in Milne Bay. Kittyhawk. A lot of people seem to think that was the turning point at Milne Bay, the Kittyhawks' participation there. It was a good aircraft. Really hard aircraft to fly apparently. I got a

32:30 pilot's licence, I did that later on. I'd have loved to jump in one. There's one down at Coolangatta airport. We've got a great association on the Gold Coast here and it was full right rudder, set the torque, but they performed well in Papua New Guinea. And in the desert.

If you were

33:00 **doing a general assessment of a typical radial engine, can you take my through step by step the process?**

Cowls up, say I'm working on a Caribou, cowls up. Your initial requirement would be to replace the spark plugs. So plug leads off. Then whilst

33:30 plug leads are off you calibrate your spark plugs, fell the gauges. Do a main inspection for leaks. Push rod cover leaks, they are very prone to leak. The main emphasis is to have a very clean engine at all times. Dirty engines are dirty habits. That's one thing you become very conscious of.

34:00 I felt the standards that were given to me, I've maintained. I always made a point, if a dirty engine came out of a service I'd send it straight back. That's sloppy tradesmanship. I let them know why. So the name of the game is clean engines at all times, clean push rod covers. Then and only then

34:30 do you have what I consider a serviceable aircraft. Then you do your run-up checks. New plugs in. Obviously you replace the oil. Check the IWC, that's the intake wall control, which controls your prop dish. Again check for leaks because it's a most sensitive part of the

35:00 system. If you have an IWC leak away from base you're in a bit of trouble. Obviously you do your power checks, your run up checks, start, see your fuel settings, your mixers control settings, and take it from

there. That's after you put your cowls back on obviously.

35:30 They were a fairly reliable motor. I think more so than you could realise. I think when you go back to the DC3, the Pratt and Whitney motor in Papua New Guinea and a lot of other parts of the world, in Europe and that, they just kept on running. The only thing that would stop them was if you took a bullet or it took a hit. They keep on running. I had an example in Vietnam where one had excessive oil consumption.

36:00 It was an eighteen-gallon tank and it was burning nine gallons of oil an hour. Here we were, it's a story you can bring up later on, I knew exactly how far I could go out before the red light, low level oil warning light came on. Then I'd come back after we done the sortie and I'd feather the motor before we ran out of oil. They were a reliable motor.

36:30 That's all that mattered. So World War II history repeated itself with the reciprocating engine in Vietnam. Incredible performance.

Were there weak spots in the engine in terms of a known weak spot?

I'll tell you now, in my experience every now and then, which was very rare,

37:00 we dropped a con-rod. That was remote. A con-rod off the crank shaft. That was highly remote. In all my time quite rare. Every now and then I'd go on an engine change with a DC3 that was in a place called in Western Australia. She

37:30 went down. Where was that place in Western Australia that aircraft went down, Marge? The DC3. On the Nullarbor Plain somewhere in the middle of nowhere. Forrest. They dropped a motor. Dropped a piston. So the motor shut down on one. The DC3 would probably hold altitude if you're empty.

38:00 They were getting a good age about them. So you look for an alternate strip. That alternate strip was Forrest. In Vietnam, yeah, we lost a couple of motors, obviously. Again, the circumstances were entirely different. You had a full complement payload and you were maintaining at altitude in a tropical environment

38:30 is very difficult. So you would not hold altitude in the majority of instances. Then you start losing altitude. The obvious panic-free moment is to look for an alternate strip and make sure you landed. If it got that mad, which one of those did, with myself. We just had to eject the load.

39:00 How many engines or motors does a Caribou have?

Two. One on either side of the fuselage. It has two. It's a twin-engine aircraft.

Is it able to operate with one without the other?

Yes, it's an asymmetric configuration that can take place.

39:30 But you also must consider the environment the aircraft's in when that asymmetric condition occurs, mainly because, if you're in the tropics, the density altitude charts change. They don't perform as well as they do in a colder environment. The Caribou is a Canadian aircraft, built in Canada, so we had to re-write the density altitude charts in New Guinea ourselves. I talk

40:00 literally step in, step out, so when it got into Vietnam we knew what its capabilities were at sea level and at altitude.

Tape 4

00:41 We'll start with that mosquito pilot story you wanted to tell.

Oh well, our prerequisite, prior to graduation from RAAF School of Technical Training was that a) obviously had to pass the theory exams and b) you also had

01:00 to satisfy the technical, tactical requirements. And that particular obligation was on the Merlin motor, the Rolls Royce Merlin, V12 of which there were two. Which had to be, which both motors had known condition problems, we had to dismantle both those motors

01:30 and rectify, or identify initially the problems, which we had no knowledge of. And refurbish, rebuild and place them in the power plants of the Mosquito, which was extensively used in Europe and wherever, and do all the linkages, prop adjustments,

02:00 ground running adjustments as such and prepare it for a pre-flight and a test flight. And that took place in, I think it was, November '57, and they brought in a qualified Mosquito pilot from down south, from Victoria, I'm sure, and so he flew to Wagga and got in his flying suit and

- 02:30 we were standing there as a group of young men and he's walked up and he said, "How good are youse?" And straight as an arrow, we just said, "Oh we've done our best, we believe you'll enjoy the moment, the flight, sir. However we're not sure
- 03:00 how it will respond at any type of altitude." Because there is altitude adjustments there for the carburation and that. And he said, "Righto," and he said, "There's going to be three things. One, I'll start both engines, so you'll be with me on the ground. And if there's a problem, it'll be immediate shut-down and I'll be out and obviously there will be a comment made to your trade test performance accordingly." "Okay." So everyone's starting to shudder a fraction so we
- 03:30 done the, he done the power run- he done the start up checks and he taxied down the end of the strip, done the full power run, see we survived part one, we survived part two. Part three was the airborne test. Flight. And so he got airborne. Put it this way, he, if you know
- 04:00 the strip at Wagga, he cranked her up at full throttle and when he lifted the undercarriage, he kept it low level. Right till the end of the strip and near to vertical, straight up, beautiful, powerful aircraft, and then he levelled out and disappeared. So we're waiting patiently and waiting patiently, waiting patiently and waiting patiently and then we
- 04:30 somehow or other we were looking at the point where we departed, because we knew he'd either come back and on a reciprocal and land into the wind as such, and, but unbeknownst to us, he come from our behind, from behind us and low level, went straight over the top. He done this beautiful barrel roll, right up the top then peeled off and come in and landed. So he's basically saying, "Well done fellas."
- 05:00 'Cause they would not be doing this unless that aircraft and those motors were in spot-on condition. And performance. So he come in and land, he walked up, shook all of our hands, and we passed a nice trade test. A nice practical trade test. And there's a photo of a couple of our guys in there, this day, they're all pretty capable fellas too. And that was it.
- 05:30 **What was it like to finish your training and graduate?**
- Oh, it was a transition. Obviously. We were, I was keen to go places. So we were obligated to do a stint in a depot for a period of time and obviously we went back to the twin-row Wasp motor and totally overhauling the twin-row Wasp
- 06:00 so you name it, I knew every nut and bolt in that twin-row Wasp. And so that was part of an obligation that I, as one of the group had; of our engine trade had. And that to me, even though it was quite mundane and laborious, I learnt a hell of a lot in the rehabilitation of a motor being pulled apart and reassembled, the twin-row Wasp and that.
- 06:30 So then I went straight onto DC-3's. So that was automatic progression so after doing the build up of the twin-row Wasp. The maintenance aspect of pre-flights and servicing of aircraft was nothing. It was nothing. It wasn't that hard a task, It was enjoyable really. You were out in the fresh air.
- And where were you based for the next**
- 07:00 **few years?**
- Richmond, Richmond airbase. And 46 Maintenance and then 38 Squadron. I, with the crew chief loadmaster's course, I nominated, and as I said to Naomi, there was reluctance there for me to, not for me, to allow me to go onto some of those courses and this one I ended up getting on. Which took a lot of hard work to get onto.
- 07:30 And as I said there were pilots, there was officers, the navy, army, air force and I topped it, I cleaned them all up. I think I got about 96.8 overall percentage, percentile in the whole course. And I'd done it for a reason. So that embraced Hercules aircraft trim, weight and balance, DC-3s and Caribous, embraced the whole lot. And then we
- 08:00 went to Canada for the ferry flight to bring back the Caribou. And that in itself was an adventure. Absolute adventure. And quite -
- Tell us about it.**
- Oh, okay. We flew via Hawaii to San Francisco, overnight San Francisco then up into Toronto. De Havilland factory at Toronto were running a fraction behind,
- 08:30 we, the aircraft so designated was a cold aircraft, as I said to Naomi, and so all the documentation related to density altitude charts for Canada. So to come back into a tropical environment you had to come back to reality and reassess performance in the tropics. So apart from that we done all the shake down flights into
- 09:00 North America, Canada, and it was our first experience with IFF as Identification Friend or Foe. And so that was a unit in our aircraft that we had yet to receive the literature on. And so here we are doing the shake down flight, and going up into north parts of Canada and the edge of Canada, North Pole and we learnt rather rapidly

- 09:30 how to turn the anti-icing on. And the de-icing and also to turn the IFF on. Because coming out of the ground with the missiles coming up out of the bloody ground, and so they got onto UHF [ultra high frequency] and HF [high frequency], they tracked us down and we were military movement, free aircraft and test flying and switch the IFF on and so that, strangely you never
- 10:00 forget those things, and so we spun around and done some more flights over Niagara Falls which was rather appropriate to have a look at. Got some nice photographs of that. And then we headed off to St John in Newfoundland. We were going up to Reykjavik in Greenland to come across into Ireland. And so it got that cold at St John, I lost a, I was on top of the main plane and I lost a filling out of my tooth, I couldn't
- 10:30 believe it and I was in agony. So we had to divert from Newfoundland to St John. We went to the Azores, right in the middle of the Atlantic. A Portuguese island. A beautiful experience and I was looking at the slides yesterday, and this taxi driver, we paid him ten US dollars to drive us around all day and we got him absolutely blind drunk
- 11:00 and he introduced us to his family and he made about five pound on the day. He'd made a lot of money. He'd made his week's wages, so we were the greatest three blokes on earth. Three (UNCLEAR) And so we went from the Azores to Gibraltar and Tex McLaughlin was the navigator so doing his moon shots. We bounced off the east coast of Africa seventy miles off course, running out of fuel. Good on Tex.
- 11:30 And he was hopeless he was. A good bloke, a funny man. So we snuck into Gibraltar. We had to have a couple of days off after that dilemma. And from Gibraltar we went to Malta. From Malta we flew down the, through the desert, and all of the history of World War II was still laying in the desert, not an ounce of rust on it.
- 12:00 That's how clean the air is. And we landed at Tobruk, El Alamein, and we stayed a few nights there. Marge's father come from Tobruk so we went to the war cemetery there and paid homage and went into town. And then I had a few problems with my motor, the starboard motor. That had a crack in the wheel case which was
- 12:30 increasing an eighth of an inch every day. So I found that in Aden and I didn't know, actually I found it in bloody Gibraltar, and so I said, "I'll monitor it." And by the time I got to Tobruk, I realised where we've got to go so we had to go up through Saudi Arabia and across to Karachi. I said, "We're going to be in a bit of trouble."
- 13:00 And so then I looked at the options. The options were it was going to take two weeks to get a motor to us. I said I could not stand two hours in bloody Gibraltar let alone two weeks. So I got the magic glue out, chewing gum, and stuck it in the crack and away we went. And I replaced the chewing gum every
- 13:30 day and so it was just amazing Australian ingenuity in a time of crisis and it worked because we flew all through. Got to Karachi and I said, "This is going to work." So, "Do you want the motor?" "No, we're going to keep on going." So we kept on replacing the chewing gum, no oil spray, no leaks, we went through the bottom of the Himalayas to
- 14:00 Calcutta, and that was a disgusting place, and then down to Bay of Bengal. We tipped the aircraft upside down in a monstrous storm and was eight-eighth cloud, we were going to fly to three. So it was a little bit touchy, a little bit scary because you couldn't let that aircraft come out of sight. You see that photo on the wall inside, that's an actual photo, one behind the other and we piggy-back step ourselves
- 14:30 and that's the way you flew in that type of weather conditions. Then we got to, after Calcutta we were full of diarrhoea, it was Holy Thursday, couldn't get a beer. No one could get beer. We ended up going to a brothel and getting a beer. And they said, "What about the other side of the business?" And we looked at each other, we nearly dry retched, you've got to be kidding. So we drank the beer and all the Indians with the little
- 15:00 red spot on their foreheads and it was a classic moment and they, we just walked out of there, but we got to Penang and we had to ground ourselves because the diarrhoea was dreadful. Then we flew across to Cocos Island which was an extraordinary trip. But going back two steps, we, when we got through Cairo, they wouldn't let us, they made us sit on the strip for three hours.
- 15:30 The Egyptian government and the Jordanian government, because we're military aircraft, wouldn't let us fly across their territory. So we had to do a dog leg and down and a couple of bad shots there by way of diplomacy but and as life goes on, when we landed at Cocos Island, we were in a massive storm, massive storm
- 16:00 and we were, even though we had internal fuel tanks, I had two five-hundred-gallon rubber tanks inside the fuselage. So we were a flying bomb. And once you got up in the altitude you had to vent the motors so there was no smoking in the aircraft at all. And the guy that was flying, anything over ten thousand feet, he'd pass out, 'cause he was a mad smoker, so I'd end up flying his course and I'd made a bunk for him to sleep in between the rubber tanks. And so
- 16:30 quite an interesting trip. So when we landed at Cocos Island, it was an absolute miracle. And as life goes on, the aircraft that I brought back was 208, I got very angry when I saw it at Oakey airbase being used for target practice and weapon damage metal work training. So Marge and I, we drove to the

airbase and I identified myself and

17:00 the engineer come on and he says, "What year was that?" I said, "What're you talking about?" He said, "When did you come back from Canada?" I said, "1964." "Did you come via Cocos Island?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You came in, in that thunderstorm didn't you?" And I said, "Yes." He says, "I was on the tarmac and I was four years old," he says. "God, you're old." This was the flight engineer at Annerley on Caribous, two years ago.

17:30 He said, "God, you must be an old bastard." And I, it was a classic, how history turns around and relates to issues of...so we just got out and walked away and drove the aircraft to Pearce and Edinburgh and to Richmond and then Marge was in Wagga, so I caught a DC-6 back there and then I got the telegram that let me know I was going into Vietnam.

18:00 With a diplomatic passport. Diplomatic green passport, three-man crew and they were anticipating a coup and we maintained the aircraft full at all times. And you've got to have the best way you knew how if it turned bad. So we, that was when we were in Vietnam, that is.

How did you feel about receiving that telegram?

I was okay.

18:30 Yeah, I wanted to go. That was my job. And at that point in time, there was a lot of things happening in South Vietnam, were rather sad and bad, you know. And if you could offset it, you would. And we were part of the SEATO, South East Asia Treaty Organisation, also, and so that was appropriate that our presence be there.

19:00 Did you personally know much of what was happening in the lead up?

Yeah, we got a fairly good idea. Our survival training at Canungra wasn't as appropriate as it should have been I don't suppose, but in view of what we ended up going into, but that was very early days.

And were the Caribous that you brought back to be used?

19:30 Oh yeah, 208, the one I brought back. Or the one that our crew brought back, that ended up in a tremendous career. It had a tremendous history about it and that's what upsets me most, the fact that it's going to be used as an artificial reef in Moreton Bay. They should have retained it in history. Quite sad. Very, very sad. However,

20:00 that's the decision of the powers to be. I wouldn't mind putting it down at the RSL. We got two 13 Squadron air cadets, they could use it. We've got the room.

Tell us about the lead up to your leaving for Vietnam.

Well our major concern, our major concern was looking after Marge and Dean and Glenn and we

20:30 basically decided that Marge go back to Wagga and god bless the little VW [Volkswagen], Marge got, Marge had a license and we, her father hitchhiked down from Wagga, and he was shot in the leg and he had gout and he came down and escorted Marge back to

21:00 Wagga and it was quite strange, we had a pre-departure drink, Alf and I, and lasted a little bit longer than it should have and we were going to bring home fish and chips, 'cause the house was all packed up we were going to bring home fish and chips for Marge and the children and Alf and myself and so we ended up blind. We ended up getting the fish and chips home but it, but Marge picked every one of the pieces of fish up and threw them at me.

21:30 And it hit the window, the blinds on the window. And to the day we left, you could still see the profiles of the fish on the blinds. And so Alf, God bless him, he jumped in, he says, "Hold it, Missy." I think that's what Margey called, "Girly." He said, "This young man's going to war and you be a little bit understanding." But that was the wrong statement because we should have been totally understanding. And so

22:00 we packed up and got to Mascot and picked up the Qantas jumbo to Singapore, the three of us; Mike Marsh, Jeff Undleston and myself. We were a pretty close crew too at that time. And well, always close, we still are. And so in transit to Perth, I wrote Marge this lovely letter of apologies and whatever and you know, and

22:30 so that was posted at Perth. Then we had the most disgusting experience from Perth to Singapore, I think we, anyone, could ever have. So we refuelled at Perth, then we got airborne and these guys started playing up on the aircraft, and bearing in mind, I was a first grade footballer in those days, I wasn't a gentleman. And

23:00 so it turned out, it was Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones. With the most disgusting, filthiest language I've ever heard. Humiliating passengers, air hostesses, the whole package. So I sat there and I said, "This is going to cost me." So I picked out the biggest one of them,

23:30 and so I grabbed him by the throat and I said, "If you don't sit down, you and the rest of them, and behave like human beings, you're going to get something you've never experienced in your life. So

please do that now, otherwise I'm going to punch the shit out of you." And strange as it may seem, the guy behind me turned out to be about a

24:00 six foot four American and he said, "And I'm with you, Aussie." And I've looked around and I shook his hand, I says, "Ron." He says, "My name's Jesse." I said, "Jesse, thank you." So those Rolling Stones sat there like little ants, all the way to Singapore and the worst thing about it, they kept us in the aircraft while those little ants

24:30 were walking by thousands of Singaporeans. And they're rock idols. So be it. So we had to sit in the aircraft and so the Rolling Stones, I could have dropped them, kicked them right out the back door. So they departed and on the way through I said, "Don't say a word. Do yourself

25:00 another favour." None of them said a word. They went down the steps and that's the last I saw of them, to this day, I still hate them. 'Cause they were bloody awful people. So we got to Singapore and,

Do you remember which Rolling Stone you grabbed?

I think it might have been the drummer, Mick was right next to him, so I mean, he's a little pissant. So anyway...

What was Keith up to?

25:30 So it breaks the lot of them rather swiftly 'cause they were all sitting together and so, anyway, they're what they are, they're probably all multi-millionaires but, you know, they need a few lessons in courtesy. And that happened.

Do you remember Keith on the flight?

Yeah. Yes. Anyway, another story.

26:00 **Tell us from Singapore.**

Singapore, we stopped at the Singapore Hotel and we had to meet this American and he gave us an overview of our requirements and somehow I reckon he was with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. He, we were obliged to meet him there. So we met him and right down the end of the bar, this guy yelled out, "Bubbles!" That was my nickname. That'll be

26:30 extracted out of this interview by the way. No I don't really care. He said, "Bubbles." And I said right down the end of the bar, and you can imagine in Singapore, you know, "That's Stumpy Ross." Stumpy and I we joined the air force together and the same intake. And he come up and he says, "What're you doing?" I said, "Minding me own business, why?" He said, "You still in the air force?" I said, "Of course I'm still in the air force."

27:00 I said, "Where are you?" He said, "I'm in Indonesia." I said, "What're you doing there?" He said, "Minding me own business, why?" "Oh okay." He said, "When are you going?" I said, "I'm going tomorrow, pretty early." And he said, "Well, I'm here for a few days." I said, "Righto." I haven't seen him since. So he went back into Indon and I haven't seen him, I did hear he was up in north Queensland but I'm not that sure.

27:30 So we PanAm flight to Saigon. The military major walked up, everyone had to remain seated. He picked, one, two, three and he says, "Sir, I want you to move to the back of the aircraft please." So we moved to the back of the aircraft still in our suits, went down to the back, he had a shoulder holster on and

28:00 we said, "Shit, this is fair dinkum." And so we went down the back, downstairs, and the other passengers disembarked within the front. We were relocated to the military component of Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, and there, there was a beautiful Australian Caribou waiting for us. And so we had our bags packed, put them on the aircraft and we went down the Delta to continue that obligation, that

28:30 wallaby aircraft had and we got to a place called, Ca Mau, we got a couple of rounds into us. And I'm still sitting there, I'm standing there and I'd taken my jacket off by now and was boiling hot and so we picked up a couple and sporadic fire and finished the day and got back to Vung Tau, that was where our village was. We

29:00 stayed in a villa and that was a part of the commencement of my tour of duty of Vietnam.

What was it like receiving a few rounds?

The first question you asked, was, "What was that?" You, when you're in the, it's strange, you identify rounds going away from you, identify rounds coming at ya, and

29:30 so it was a, yeah, it created awareness. I was aware then, where I was and Owen Murrell was the crew chief at that time and he, yeah, so we got to Vungers and established ourselves and that was the start of it.

What were your first impressions of Vung Tau?

The

- 30:00 villa. Fairly primitive. Mainly because we were in a villa we weren't in the inner compound of the Vung Tau base at all. The Australians were a ground crew component and an air crew component, we, the villa was
- 30:30 right near Vung Tau Harbour. Vung Tau and Back Beach was Back Beach so termed. And the white mice, they were the uniformed police, Vietnamese, in white uniforms, so we called them white mice, because they were so small. They controlled our outer perimeter of the villa, twenty four hours a day. But
- 31:00 they were as weak as water. If anything happened, they'd just, they just weren't there when it did happen, you know. So I think the other aspect of it was at that time, and I spoke to Al Grassby in return as a result of an introduction to Al Grassby on my return to Vietnam from Marge's brother-in-law, that we as an Australian component, flying under the operational command of the 315th Air Command air group,
- 31:30 had to fend for ourselves for food. So there was no mess there, there was no cooks, there was nothing there so. And the Australians, the ground crew and that, it was a bit of a depressing bloody period because the Australian, some were good at fending for themselves, and survival, and it goes back to where I come from initially, and some were not that good.
- 32:00 And some were absolutely bloody hopeless. And full of their own self pity. And so, they couldn't look after themselves to save their life. That was the ground crew. So that's what I said to Pippi, I said, "Some of those guys need a good smack in the ear and grow up fast." And so they wouldn't feed themselves, they'd drink, they'd take advantage of the
- 32:30 alcohol being so cheap and whatever and so me, I went up town, sat in the markets, sat in the gutters, ate what I had to eat and drank at the Barmy Bar; that's a beer that's got a very alcoholic content from about 4% to 12. So you could have three one day and be full as a tick and have six the next day and be okay. But I adjusted
- 33:00 and I made a point of buying my own fresh vegetables. And I'd go up the butchers, which was very unpleasant, there was all flies all over it, and I'd buy my meat. And I'd have a casserole, which I still cook casseroles today. And once I've eaten all the meat, the next day it'd probably be soup. So it was okay. So I had two days of food. Then breakfast we'd leave
- 33:30 before first light. And we'd take off and we'd use a quarter-tonne truck and put ammunition, grenades, weapons, tool box and whatever and put that on the aircraft. The pre-flight would already have been done. Our first obligation was initially to go to Saigon, you pick up your flag, and that's for breakfast I'd have the biggest hot dog you'd ever seen in
- 34:00 your life. I'd have a hot dog, I'd put diced onions, diced radish, diced this, diced that, tomato sauce, mustard and that was my meal for the day and I used to, we used to have these ridiculous supply of saturate orange juice, so I used to take these everywhere with me. And I'd soon go to a Special Forces camp on the 406 or 41 mission. I'd swap it, swap them,
- 34:30 for water. If they give me water in Saigon, you couldn't drink the other stuff. And weapons. And I'd also, but that's another issue, and I think the, if I could break the commitment up into certain sections: one there was an obligation the Australian Squadron had was to do the Delta.
- 35:00 Fly down the Delta and that'd embrace Long Xuyen which was where the medical team were, the hospital team. All the way down to Ca Mau, and down to Ha Tien. So Ha Tien in itself is an area where we had a few problems. And then the northern run out of Saigon, this route, the southern Delta one, would take a day.
- 35:30 The northern run would take a day, that's to go to all Special Forces camps including Nha Trang, and then come back through the inland and back to Tan Son Nhut to Saigon and back to Vung Tau. And that would take about a day. Ha Tien itself is a unique place where Father Wa was, the strip was ridiculously narrow and
- 36:00 it was a reclaimed strip out of mud, swamp. So they just packed the mud up and they put perforated steel plating on this particular strip and once you landed, you couldn't turn around. That's how narrow it was and even a three turn truck turn, couldn't turn around. You had to trot along, tower back, reverse back all the way back to the threshold where you landed. And again, getting back to
- 36:30 density of altitudes, that was a pretty active area down there you know, and I used to carry away five empty shells out of there. And we had a few problems, miscalculated one day and we rooster-tailed across the swamp there for quite a while before we got airborne and was rather, it was a real time, serious, but it was quite funny, because when you're in that sort of a world, you're,
- 37:00 we adopt a rather strange sort of humour. And if you don't adopt that strange sort of humour you go down the drain, you know. So it was a funny rooster-tail out and I miscalculated the weight of the bloody empty 105 [105mm howitzer] shell and it's not like me to do that, you know. And so in my enthusiasm of getting these shells out, we took a few too many and
- 37:30 anyway, we're still here, but our backsides were twitching for a couple of hundred yards I can tell you,

across the water. But getting to Ha Tien again, just initially, we, and is a unique story. We did lose an aircraft in at Ha Tien and Barry Ingate, he rang the other day and I haven't seen Barry for, haven't seen him since Vietnam, he's coming up here and he wants to see me, but

- 38:00 the message ran out and I didn't get the last couple of numbers. But Barry Ingate was the crew on that particular Caribou that went in. And so we done the recovery and having done the recovery we were obligated to go back in there again. And I lost a primary screw out of me magneto in the starboard motor and of all places to be on Earth, two hours before last light, is not Ha Tien I can tell you.
- 38:30 So the CO, the commanding officer, Doug Harvey, DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and bar, air force Cross, he flew ah, 467 [Squadron] bombers in Europe, World War II. We worked out a way of, we had no ladder, once you opened the cowl, you could open the cowl no problem, but we get up the top of the motor that was quite impossible. I said, "Righto Doug." I got a 44 gallon drum of fuel, I
- 39:00 got two boxes of hand grenades, and a box of ammunition and smoke grenades, and sat them all on top of each other so I could stand up and access the magneto. And I said, "Doug, this primary screw, I've only got one." He said, "How'd you have that screw?" I said, "I've got everything in that tool box." I said, "But I've only got one." I said, "Mate, if we drop this we're rat shit." I said, "Now, for Christ's sake,
- 39:30 keep still." "Okay." So next minute there's a bit of sporadic fire coming in so I'm just about to insert this primary screw on the top of this motor that's red hot and I'm burning my arms on the exhaust stack and the first sporadic fire, Doug's started. I said, "Doug, I won't talk to you again, keep effin' still, I'm serious."
- 40:00 He said, "I know you are." I said, "Well, for Christ's sake keep still." So, just as I was inserting this screw, we get a couple more came in and I'd just got the first thread started and Doug's nearly pushed me off the whole bloody grenades and the whole lot. So I said, "Doug, that was close." So I screwed it down, I dropped the cowl and we've got airborne. In the interim it's
- 40:30 poured raining and we're wringing wet. Oh once you get up in the altitude, you're hot down there, next minute we're shivering. And Doug's a man of few words and there'll be a few more stories told about him too, he said, "That was rather close Ron, wasn't it?" I said, "Doug, yes it was." And he said, "Were you serious, you only had one screw?" I said,
- 41:00 "No I had two." He said, "Why'd you tell me, one?" I said, "Just to sure you didn't make a mistake." He said, "I'll remember that." I said, "It's good being alive Doug, isn't it?" He said, "Yes, it certainly is, Ron." And we were very, very close until we buried him in February this year. Very close man. He taught us how to harness sadness and fear. He was very good, very good at what he did.

Tape 5

- 00:35 I think if we go back to the initial impact on arriving in Vietnam and Saigon and relocating to Vung Tau. I think it's interesting to qualify, the Australian component of RAAF transport flight, Vietnam, did have to rely
- 01:00 on their own resources regarding food and whatever and it was a culture shock, which is understandable. And we were there before the Australian Army arrived so that has to be clearly qualified and identified and so there was no basic support food-wise, and you can understand some of the reactions of some of the ground crew and aircrew and we relied on food parcels from home,
- 01:30 from Marge, but in transit from Saigon the VC, the Viet Cong'd either ambush the trucks, looking for money or the indigenous'd hit the trucks, and so you'd get a food parcel that was pilfered with and anything that was valuable and attractive not there. So that compounded the problem, plus letters from home not arriving also compounded the problem and needless to say, the graph of depression went down a bit for a lot of the guys,
- 02:00 probably included myself, so that in itself, didn't let up. And so from there, my circumstances in Vietnam I appreciate what happened to me, in time. But only because it happened when I first arrived. At that time, the RAAF transport flight
- 02:30 objectives, mission statement, was the same as the 315th Air Commandos, USAC [United States Air Corps]. So we had seven-day attachments out of Da Nang, which was up on the North Vietnamese border and seven-day attachments at Nha Trang, which worked the central highlands of Vietnam and the Laotian and Cambodian border. So
- 03:00 two very, very sensitive attachments. By the fact that the Australian crew chief, or load master, not only was he involved with the load master activities, he also was the tradesman away from those, on those attachments in every trade. So he looked after the whole aircraft, engines, airframes, electrical, radio, instruments, the whole lot, so he
- 03:30 to me, was a very unique person compared to our counterparts on the 123 Providers [Fairchild C-123 Provider transport aircraft], the Americans who had the same mission statement as us. The, whereby

they had a prop man who only looked after propellers, they had a spark plug man, who only had to look after spark plugs and so they had a tyre man, who only looked after tyres, and so there's an entourage there, of whatever. But we operated

- 04:00 as a three-man crew, with assistant load masters. And so having said that, I arrived in country on the seventeenth. On the twenty-first I was up on the North Vietnamese border. So my war had already started straight away. Shit hit the fan. And so, and added to that, I was with the commanding officer of the first contingent that went up there. So again, there was a tremendous amount of
- 04:30 experience there and we flew missions which were quite extraordinary and the missions were in the Ashau Valley, the most deadliest valley in Vietnam at that point in time. We did lose a Caribou in Ashau Valley which went all the way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and eventually in life those airstrips were abandoned because of the enemy
- 05:00 intensity in the area. So, and they virtually, they made the film "Hamburger Hill" out of Ashau Valley. But had they done it right, and spoken to the right people, it would have been a better film. We had the opportunity to be in just at the premiere of that particular movie but in the interim, walking through all parts of Vietnam was the Australian Army Training Team in
- 05:30 two-man teams. And they were assigned to Special Forces camps, US Special Forces camps with Mike Force and the 5th Special Forces, and these guys would pop up anywhere. And this particular gentleman popped up in a monsoonal rain depression in the Ashau Valley, which wasn't very pleasant at the day, and a DC-3 with Gatling guns called a
- 06:00 "Spooky," was made available for us to do our job and it was a really harsh introduction, bearing in mind, seven days before I was in Sydney. So you know, you find yourself in a dimension in your life which is quite extraordinary so we got out of that, that particular day, but in the interim there was cause to take some dead bodies on board and they, that
- 06:30 was a part of life, and we got back to Da Nang and repackaged our circumstances and so then we came back to Vung Tau for a bit of spell. That did take place and the next day I was in Nha Trang for seven days in the, in the central highlands and so my,
- 07:00 the intensity of my circumstances were there right from the word go, which I didn't mind. It was certainly a rude awakening to what it was all about and so the central highlands was, and the work we did there on the Cambodian border with resupplying Special Forces camps with obviously ammunition and people.
- 07:30 And you'd take out the dead, as such. Was a part of everyday. So that to me, by mid- February, mid-March, I was okay. So the rest was okay. But there were, there were some very dis-, very sad moments too, you know and I think, but what we were experiencing was that with morale
- 08:00 came loss of dedication to the task. And we were in Nha Trang and on our outbound we got an intersection take off. Down the end of the strip was a flight of four F4-104s burning kero, biting at the bit, full power, and the control tower for some reason told us to do an intersection take off.
- 08:30 That means, halfway up the strip there's a little, you just turn onto the main strip and do a STOL [short take off and landing] take off, that's a short landing and take off and get out of the way. So I could just imagine the commander of the F104s being rather infuriated when we were being given precedence over four F104s going on a combat strike. So, silly as it sounds, we admitted we were having technical problems,
- 09:00 stupid technical problems that were avoidable. So on the outbound, full power, we kept the brakes on, we'd done this magnificent STOL take off and we're full of ammunition and pigs and chickens and everything else that you carry and the commander of the 104 Flights said, "Wallaby zero three, you've dropped something." So the three of us are sitting in the cockpit and said, "Shit, what was
- 09:30 that, Worko?" I said, "I don't know." So I've looked out the side, and there's our nose-wheel, bouncing along the tarmac rather majestically, so the control tower said, "Wallaby zero three what are your intentions?" And they looked at me and they said, "What're we going to do, Worko?" I said, "Well turn left, go to sea and keep low. Thousand foot and we'll sort it out." And so, "Nha Trang, this is Wallaby zero three, we'll do
- 10:00 a left hand turn and have dial up with you shortly." Turned left. And the 104s were given clearance to take off and they blasted past us, done the barrel rolls and said, "Good luck Wallaby." It was a classic, was an absolute classic. So we had the situation at full fuel, full capacity,
- 10:30 maximum load, so they said, "What're we going to do?" So I said, "We'll land. We haven't got another nose-wheel, we'll land." And, "Well, how?" And I said, "Well just hold it up, hold it up and hold it up and hold it up and full flaps, full left, full undercarriage down and we'll just come to a decision where the aircraft will naturally gravitate to the ground and we'll continue on and we'll pick up the nose-wheel, God bless us, and fix the problem."
- 11:00 But that in itself clearly qualified a need to create awareness with our ground crew. And so I got back to Vung Tau and I spoke to Doug Harvey, our CO and I said, "Doug, it might be wise to think, if we could,

on the next attachments, that you take a member of our ground crew on each and every attachment so that they can understand the

- 11:30 aircraft and it's operationally viable. And understand the quality of servicing that's needed 'cause, there's not an ordinary nook run it's a combat environment." He said, "Okay. Do it." I said, "Righto." He said, "Who are you going to pick?" Well I thought about it I said I picked a street fighter. His name was Jack Donnellan, he's now dead.
- 12:00 Jack was six foot three, and a street fighter, boxer, street fighter. He loved nothing better than going down Kings Cross and belting the shit out of poofers. And that's what he did. Just for fun, you know, pick 'em up, dust 'em up and just have fun. So Jack arrived in the tail end of midway through my tour of duty and I said, "Jack, how'd you like to come up to Da Nang with me?"
- 12:30 I said, "Get you out of the hangar." He said, "You've got me. Righto." "Saturday, two o'clock, see you at the aircraft and we're going." "Righto." Jack turns up, shorts, long socks, Hawaiian tropical shirt his coat hanger over his fingers and he's got all these Hawaiian shirts and classy
- 13:00 shirts and little bag of clothes. I've pulled up in a quarter tonne truck, put my tool box on board, put my weapons on board ammunition on board, we always had to carry the box of hand grenades, I always carried a box of smoke grenades. I always carried tracer too. So anyway that was part of my fly-away kit and
- 13:30 I got his clothes, and the static line, runs down the centre, which we use for supply dropping and para dropping, put his clothes on the static line and I threw them right up the front of the aircraft and I said, "Jack, you didn't by any chance bring any overalls with you, did you?" He said, "No, do you want a pair?" I said, "No but just in case you're going to do a bit of servicing on this aircraft, seven days we're away." He said, "Okay." I said, "Bring the keys
- 14:00 to the quarter tonne." And I said, "Better bring your tool box too." And as soon as he put his bum on the seat I said, "Listen, when was the last time you fired that weapon?" He said, "I haven't yet." I said, "If you're going to bring that," I said, "I suppose you don't have any ammo?" He said, "No." I said, "Alright, I'll organise the ammo." So Jack's gone home and I said, "You've got twenty minutes mate." Jack's gone back to the villa got everything, come back ready to go. Put him on board.
- 14:30 We gets up to Da Nang a two-and-a-half-hour trip and so here's Jack in the mess. Life of Riley you know, he's into the grog, food, very, very pleased with himself, it's Saturday afternoon and he's not in the villa and drinks for nothing, the army paid for, actually you paid nothing. And so apart from a small pittance for your beer and that.
- 15:00 So we were staying, they called this the Devil's Club, skull and crossbones when you go in, and Da Nang there. And up on Monkey Mountain, some things start to happen, the VC started some insertions and whatever and mortaring and whatever and so we were out of the mess. The strange thing, when we went into the
- 15:30 inner compound, we all had to hand our weapons in. This is quite macabre because anyway, our weapons were handed in and there's a massive armoury there and so we were sitting up on these conexes drinking beer, watching fire fight. So the next morning, but Jack wanted to keep on drinking. I said, "Jack we're going to be up at four-thirty mate, we've got a big day tomorrow and, "I'll just have
- 16:00 a few more." I said, "Well see you later." So we were staying in the Negro section. And they were some lovely people there and so there was a bit of southern concern or hatred if you want to call it, with Negroes, but we were with the, so they had white crews, they had mixed crews they had dark crews, it was quite interesting and it was sort of a bit of a shock to us and so anyway, obviously as the
- 16:30 morning unfolded, we end up that night in the trench. Yes it got a bit worse and so Jack fell in the trench and I was sitting on the top having a, I had a glass of scotch in me hand. And so we got away the next morning and I got him up early and the weather came in and we had to go up into Khe Sanh. And so the weather socked right in so we went out to sea and come up a river mouth,
- 17:00 built our way level, level up to Khe Sanh. But along the way there was a lot of unnecessary people on the ground and so we were made aware of this because the 123 Provider took a hit about five minutes before us and I said, "Jack, you on the air?" 'Cause I had him on headset. He said, "Yeah, Worko, I'm here." And I said, "Listen mate, we've got a bit of a
- 17:30 problem." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Well we're going to be up and down here all day and we got a situation where I want you to see people, if they're shooting at you, to let me know so we can isolate them and locate them properly then you know that weapon, you start shooting them back." I said, "You copy that Jack?"
- 18:00 I said, "Jack are you on the air?" Nothing. "Jack, I'm talking to you and I need you to talk back to me." Nothing, nothing again. And I looked down the back of the Caribou and here he is shaking his head. I said, "Jack, I'm talking to you." He said, "You bastard." I said, "Jack." He said, "You rotten bastard." I said, "Jack there's three things you can do mate." He said,
- 18:30 "What's that?" I said, "Mate you can run up and down the plane and be a moving frickin' target or you

can sit there on your arse and get one through your arse and one out the top of your head. Or the third one is, do as I told you. If you see someone shooting at you, shoot back." He said, "I'll get you, Worko, I will." So seven days later, it was a tough week, I must admit that. Seven days later we left Da Nang and got back to Vung Tau. He got out of

19:00 the plane, he said, "Worko, you are a stone ravin' rat." And he said, "Don't ever, ever ask me to get in a Caribou with you again. Don't even ever ask me to fly with you again." I said, "Jack, it's a job that has to be done, and I appreciate your comments and I really appreciate you passing your comments on to the other people, 'cause I just don't feel comfortable with their servicing standards at the moment." And I said,

19:30 "If you could make sure that we get a nice clean planes going away otherwise each and every one of them are going to get their turn." And they did. And it turned out very healthy for them because they got a chance to be away from the drudgery of the day and so that was one good initiative that actually worked well. And right up until the end it worked well. So out of it all, Jack went back to Penrith, and

20:00 became the director of Penrith Leagues Club and I was a rugby league player at Penrith, his club and so, and Jack coached our son at cricket and so it went on and we had some funny moments in our life and actually Jack was- when I first joined the air force, Jack was doing his engine mechanics traineeship. He was an adult trainee, so as life goes around

20:30 it did go round. And so those particular attachments, and one other special sort of a mission that took place was required as need be, 41 mission or 406 mission, was where you're called into, you went to Saigon and you picked up a frag with a Special Forces camps in trouble, Special Forces camps being overrun,

21:00 or issues like that. But for quite some time, I'd been calling up this and I can't remember the name of the strip although it should be indelibly printed in me brain. And if you can recall me saying about the little saturated tins of orange juice, I used to take them, hoard them, and I used to treat them like little lumps of gold. I used to, every now and then, by chance

21:30 call into Special Forces camp and this big Snow, was an ex-gridiron player, current gridiron player, massive man, a huge man. And we hit it off well, mainly because rugby league, gridiron, same, same. And I used to take a block of ice out of Saigon, it'd be twice as long as that esky there. And I'd have it wrapped in a char rag. By the time I got it to

22:00 them it'd be third of the size, it'd be about this big by that. But that was ice and that was precious, you know and that with the orange juice, that was really number one. And so that it cost nothing, it cost me nothing, but if you could do that, you did it. And so we had this relationship going on and every now and then I'd get a nice weapon, and I'd get nice clothes, you know

22:30 pair of boots or something and the boots are still out the side that Snow gave me. And they're a bit battered now, but the, it was good. So then we got a call, Doug Harvey and myself, when the flares hit that night and we had to go back in again. And it turned out that they'd totally overrun the camp. And we had to take the dead out and bloody, poor old Snow came out; they'd

23:00 disembowelled him and penis in the mouth, and pretty tough stuff it was. And there was a lot of people running around that I believe were VC and they were quite a lot of them wounded. And the poor old Snow, they'd done it hard on him and I took offence to it and Doug Harvey, the CO he said, "Ronnie, listen to me." I said, "Righto, righto." I was starting to

23:30 blow up. He said, "Listen to me." I said, "I'm not going to, Doug." He said, "Listen to me." I said, "What's up?" He said, "You've seen more blood on bloody Parramatta oval playing against bloody St George than you have here." And I said, "Yeah, alright Doug, alright." I said, "But he's still a human being." And so they'd done a dreadful job. So we put him, he was on tiger poles, so we put him on board and got them out of the place but that was tough.

24:00 Pretty tough.

Can you take me through that situation from the beginning, what had happened to their camp exactly?

Well, we'd left them the day before and we knew there was movement there, enemy movement that is, and we, and they were aware of it and so were we. So there was an insertion of more ammunition, we knew there was something going down

24:30 and the VC were very competent jungle people, and so we done the resupply before the event and unbeknownst to us, they hit that night. The VC overrun the place that night and flares were called. Flares were dropped and flares were still burning in the trees when we got there. The next morning. But they hit that hard and that fast, Snow had his boots on

25:00 and he'd just had enough time, he didn't tie his boots up, he didn't have enough, he just had enough time to put his pants on and the rest he was naked. And they just mutilated him, you know. Mutilated the rest of them too. And so out of it all the people that I did have on board, there was a couple of suspect ones there. And so we, I just had that funny feeling, you know. And I had a bloody nice

- 25:30 Solingen knife that I lost on Tallebudgera. I was out mackerel fishing on the ski. And it's a nice stick-bladed knife, you know, back-bladed, nice and thick, good jungle blade. Was that long. And you never fire forward 'cause of the people up the front. And so I was down the back and another guy I worked out was a runner, the bullet hole went in the back of him and
- 26:00 he was a runner. So I reckon he was VC. So I got out some raw iodine and poured that on him. And I enjoyed every second of it, and so the other one, there was about five of them. And in the intensity of the moment, it was just, a lot of things were still happening, we threw them on board without really checking any basic
- 26:30 credentials and that. So these buggers had bloody infiltrated the outer perimeter to the inner perimeter and lay dormant until the hit come on and then you're in the inner perimeter. You get them during the night time. And you know, so that was a regular thing. And so anyway, one of these, get back with the knife. I bought it at Nock and Kirby's at, down the Haymarket in Sydney, back in the days when Nock and Kirby's existed.
- 27:00 And I tried to throw this knife to stick in regularly, every other day of the week. To throw the knife. See if it'll stick in. It always hit with the butt, bounce off, pierce the wood, you know, bounced off everything, bounced off everywhere. So I threw this knife and failed, fail, fail. So I turned around and this little mongrel's coming at me. And
- 27:30 I couldn't fire forward and I said, "Two things are going to happen, I'm either going to kill you or I'm going to knock you out. So it's better than what's going to happen." So I threw the knife at him. He'd be the most unluckiest bastard on earth. It went straight in and he looked at me and time stood still and I said, "Mate, you are the most unluckiest bastard on earth." And so I had a bit of an audience; there were some prisoners there
- 28:00 and there was three, four, three left now that were suspect. So the three left, didn't move. I left the knife in him and, stuff him. And then you think you can get the knife out and it's not that easy getting the knife out, so as silly as it may sound, it was quite embarrassing, but not embarrassing but just a situation that did occur. And I still had Snow on the floor
- 28:30 looking at me, and lifted him up the side of the aircraft. I tore all the skin off his arm and I'm saying, "Sorry." I'm saying, "Sorry." You know in the stress of the moment, the intensity of the moment I got this big bloody bamboo pole and Snow's hanging off one end to the other and I pulled him up in the...shits were trumps so I shaved his arm off nearly. I'm apologising and so you just sit there and, at the end of the day we call for the Hotspot, that's in Saigon and
- 29:00 they haven't seen Snow since, but his name's on the Wall of Remembrance in Washington and we saw it.
- When this man came at you, where did he come from and how he was moving towards you?**
- No, he's a little insignificant little Viet Cong. Pretty deadly little devil though and I tried to work out to this, not to this day, but I tried to work out why. He probably wanted to throw me out the back,
- 29:30 after I put the iodine on the other guy, you know, that was fair enough, he probably wanted to get rid of me, fair enough.
- This was inside the plane?**
- Oh yeah. Yeah. Snowy went off. The numbers were the same, what came on. What went off.
- Can you describe what the scene was like when you first landed at this camp?**
- Camp? Yeah. Chaos.
- 30:00 A lot of action going on and then there was a quiet, there was a quiet, there was an absolute quiet. And then I see all the flare parachutes hanging off the trees and that and the smoking and it was just a strange sort of dwell, you know. And then once the bou-bou, the Caribou, got in there, there was just, again the movement of the, the brush, movement sort of created a bit of a situation again. But the damage had
- 30:30 been done. They were gone.
- What was the main purpose of the Caribou going? What were you in there to do?**
- Hot extraction. Yeah, we've done that quite a few times. Same with the evacuation of Kham Duc. That was the same situation, there's a date there somewhere, the evacuation of Kham Duc. That, strange as it may seem,
- 31:00 Doug, and I call him Doug, he was a really close friend of mine, we had some special moments in the air together and we grew close by second nature and up in Khe Sanh, will verify that which I'll tell you about. But the evacuation of Kham Duc was a similar 41, where we, you didn't know where you were going that morning and all of a sudden you're in a shit fight.
- 31:30 And that was the case, and unfortunately I had one new guy there that had never been in an aircraft before. He, his baptism as to what it was all about was rather horrendous. And we, Kham Duc was a

Special Forces camp that was positioned at the end of the strip, and the, we acknowledged,

32:00 we called for smoke. We got amber. The smoke criteria's green is clear, amber, beware sporadic, red, overrun. You never ever got red because you wouldn't go in and so, "Oh we get amber, we'll go in. We did get red a couple of times and the call sign was 'Dan boom one seven'. So we done a normal STOL approach, however

32:30 in comparison to the Americans, the STOL approach was very successful. That's a steep, steep take off and steep, steep landing. And so we done the STOL approach and I, for some, I had a harness on and while I did, I was, when I knew what was going on, you, I just found that I used to get a sixth sense. I took both the doors off, so I could fire out both doors on the side,

33:00 and I always, oh everyone had the cargo door up and the ramp was up so you could fire out, one, two, three. And I put a harness on, a static iron harness, and so they'd measure myself to the cargo ramp and I'd make sure I could toe the line, that's the ramp door, without pulling out, so you could get good range of, good arc of fire, and same with the door either side. The other boy, I just put him up front of the aircraft

33:30 and strapped him in and sat him on a steel plate. And so I was up the back, 'cause the - on FM they let us know that there was a bit of movement down the end of the strip at the threshold so we, I walked, I kept up the back and I had some good weapons with me and so

34:00 we've gone over the threshold and I thought, "Holy Jesus! And thank God they're all bad shots." I, mate I shit myself. I tell you that now. And I said, "Jesus Christ! Doug, they're everywhere." Then I saw all the movement and he said, "How many?" I said, "Look, if there's not two hundred there that I can see, you can get me." And so we've landed and the objective was obviously an extraction so we,

34:30 the configuration occurred where you can take twenty eight people, about seventy Vietnamese on board. Thank God we hit a crossroad in the Long Hais [Hills], otherwise we'd still be there I reckon. But it was another story, but it was raining and we had to get them out. So what I did, I used to double that and I'd put sixty on because Vietnamese were ninety pound (UNCLEAR) and we're one hundred pound (UNCLEAR) and maximum payload six thousand

35:00 pound plus. And I'd always plus. Because I knew the aircraft and it could handle it. So we were taking a fair swag out, and bearing in mind we had to be reasonable altitude before we got to the end of the strip, because we were getting it on the outbound. So we done one extraction then we come in for another one and it got worse. So we aborted that landing,

35:30 and I said, "Jesus Christ, Doug." So he said, "How about I go round and we'll sort ourselves out and I'll cut the strip in half?" And I said, "Fair enough." And I said, "So right." "So, you be there, Ronnie." I said, "Righto mate." And so instead of coming straight over the threshold we've done a

36:00 half the strip and done a real steep, a steep ninety-degree turn, but when we done the ninety-degree turn the actual crosswind got us and took us off. Took us off the strip. Into the clearing and we've made contact with the ground. And may God strike me dead, the wing actually bent. Doug put power on, the wing bent and I said, "Oh we're

36:30 gone here." And it bent and Doug put power on and his beautiful eloquent dialogue of bombing over Britain, he said, "Ronnie, you still there?" He said, "I'm terribly sorry about that." And I said, "Doug, I'm just here by the skin of me bloody teeth. Thanks very much, mate." He said, "Well, we'll have to discuss this further." And I said, "That might be wise." So we've gone around, we've done it again and

37:00 landed, put on the packs, so in the interim, so I'm doing the runner around the aircraft looking for holes and any weeps and...but we had self-sealing fuel tanks, which was good, great design. And so I did the run around. So you're on a moving target with a white helmet on and mate. And by this time, they'd penetrated further down on the side of the strip. So the Special Forces camp was there

37:30 and so they've cut the strip in half, spun around, engines turning, so that creates a bit of unnecessary hysteria for the people who are worrying about their lives. Because it was all on. And so that creates panic and all the other things that happen when that's going down. So it's very hard to create an orderly sort of departure, because people are hysterical. And so after my little tap dance,

38:00 mate I, hookers can't run for shit, 'cause you learn to run fast, Naomi. So I've done the run around, put everyone on board, we've done the departure again and they've got us again. And he said, "What do you think Ron?" I said, "Well we've still got bloody sixty to go and we'll call for a fighter escort." He said, "Righto." So we rang up, we dropped the,

38:30 we dropped the people at Dong Nai, I think, and so we've come back in for another shot, and so these A1-E's, [Douglas Skyraider] these fighter pilots, they're like you see in the movies, you know, the canopy's back and the scarf's there and this guy's waving to me in the, he said, "Ron, you call it. You call the napalm." I said, "Righto," I said, "You sure?" He said, "Yeah. You call it." So, I'm on FM with these guys, talking to

39:00 them and one's got a like a Wesson pistol, you know, he's brandishing it, you know they're all lunatics, but in good faith, they're only mucking around, but it was mucking around at a real life and death

- situation. So I called the napalm, both sides and that wasn't very pleasant and, but the hit was one hundred percent correct on the left. One hundred percent on the right and so that retarded the
- 39:30 situation rather dramatically and it created a sort of a physical impression too when these poor buggers were burning. When they run into the clearing it wasn't very pleasant. But at the end of the day, it created a situation of reluctance for them to come any further, so when the A1-E's kept above us, and so we done another run load and we finished the exercise before the last light. We couldn't
- 40:00 go in any more. I think there was about ten left. Never saw them again, but there was still ten there. So that's another day out, 41 mission. Long day.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **You said you had a bit of a discussion about calling in the napalmer. Why was there a discussion about it?**

Well, even though you are in a situation of absolute intensity, you just don't like creating that sort of mayhem. And as strange as it may seem,

- 01:00 in the venom of the moment, there are times when you, as a human being, obviously pause, you know and at the end of the day, you've also got to react to that and there's a job to do and the objective's there and they're going for the objective in the same was as you are, but in a different manner. And so that's your answer.

Was there something particular about the way napalm acts that..?

Oh, it's dreadful.

- 01:30 Yeah. Yeah, we felt the shockwave from where we were. And it is a horrendous roar and takes no prisoners at all. It's just instant.

Describe for me, what the shockwave is like.

To me it's a shockwave in two ways: the physical shockwave and it's a shockwave that you've created it. The shock

- 02:00 to your system that will probably never go away. There. It happened and but at the end of the day, that's your job and that's what you had to, it's a call that had to be called.

What's the sight of it like, first hand?

Oh human beings, being there one minute and not the next. And the people on the periphery, the outer periphery

- 02:30 on fire, and quite horrific really. There's no other word for it, I don't believe. Quite horrific.

Did you want to look or not want to look?

Oh, you had to look. You had to look. Only because it was there, it was right in front of me, you know. Then again to ensure that the

- 03:00 hit was spot on, that there's any residuals, you redirect the A1-E's to either strafe them or see if they've got any more cans left. You know, go back and get some more. But that was it.

On such a mission, how do you steel yourself for going back in and landing, when you're coming under such heavy fire and..?

Well, I had the pleasure of being with a

- 03:30 fine gentleman. The co-pilot, had he been in the situation that the commanding officer was in he may have made another alternative arrangement, I'm not that sure. But I had the pleasure of being with Doug on many occasions and we adopted a diplomatic process,

- 04:00 there was discussion within the cockpit on special times. And I'll bring that up to you at Khe Sanh, where we had a consensus in the cockpit that, he looked at me and I said, "Well, I'm here for a reason. That's our job, you know." And he agreed, so we, that was our way of addressing

- 04:30 issues like that. Which I didn't mind, I didn't mind at all.

How do you steel yourself for some things...you said they were running around the plane, the white helmet, being shot at. How do you do that?

I really don't know. Because, you know, that's a situation you have and okay, when you look at that type of exposure the run around is a

05:00 preferable one before, and then the other alternative is the unknown. Then you have a full compliment of maximum haul-up weight on board and then you kill the lot of them. So when you look at the ratio, it's an obvious obligatory to participate in. That was done. I've done it and it was necessary to do. In view of, those particular circumstances at that

05:30 particular time.

What was the scene like on board, you described there was sixty odd..?

Yeah, there was a lot of people there that were eyes like golf balls. Quite alert, quite upset, quite hysterical. And quite calm. Some were relieved and more relieved as we got further outbound. And horribly relieved when we landed.

06:00 **Who were they?**

Indigenous people. Indigenous, you see in the Special Forces camps, the employment component of the indigenous people required the families and the children to be with the fighters, the indigenous. And that was part of the arrangement. The operational arrangement with Vietnam and that's why there's a....In your carrying the dead,

06:30 if there were contacts being made at Special Forces camp and there were dead, as a result of that contact, we were obliged to take them back to their original province. There were times when the, they made homemade coffins out of wood and wood was warped and the bodies couldn't get out for five, ten, fourteen days. And they absolutely stank. And the,

07:00 that was a commitment and I, honestly, I've had the whole floor of the Caribou with dead. And in laying the dead down, and trying to create before and after vertical restraint, it's not an impossible. And even if you lay and intertwine them and hope the hell that when you take off...the surge of the blood and whatever creates a skateboard and

07:30 there's a centre of gravity movement to the rear of the aircraft and you're in trouble. And the same when you're coming in to land, you're in trouble. And more so than you realise. And you know, quite honestly, I've done, without body bags, I've put corn and rice, fifty pound bags, fifty kilo bags, I beg your pardon, fifty kilo bags of rice

08:00 on top and tied the bodies, tied the cargo down from one end of the aircraft to the other with rice and corn. And when we got to this Special Forces camp on the Laotian border, it was right up the top, they were elated. And the Montagnards are lovely people, they're mountain people, and they were elated and they were singing and carrying on and two things went wrong.

08:30 The rice wasn't white, it was brown and the bodies were underneath it. And so there was a harmonious unloading procedure taking place until they lifted the corn bag and saw this dead body looking at them and they just went straight over the top of me. Just clean. I was standing out the back. And it's understandably understandable. And it

09:00 was sad that I had to resort to that situation where to get rid of the stench, yeah, I covered the bodies with that type of material. And it was plastic material, so it wasn't impervious to the blood. So that was a two fold situation that I solved and it wasn't very nice because the stench was just unbearable.

09:30 Dry retching. I'm talking dry retching where you have uncontrollable dry retching. You know there just was, and there was nothing in my stomach 'cause I hadn't eaten since that morning and it was late afternoon and so you know, in the end I unloaded the whole aircraft myself. And apologised to the people and the chief and whatever and the Special Forces people and that was a situation that took place.

10:00 **Were you told about these cultural..?**

Oh, it wasn't a cultural thing, it was just an ethical thing. Cultural, brown rice, well brown rice they didn't, actually I knew that the demand for white rice was quite high and brown rice was considered brown rice, and here we in this country and in any other country, brown rice is much healthier for you, you know, but the Montagnard people, white rice was

10:30 a luxury. And they were promised white rice. That wasn't our fault. But it compounded the situation rather dramatically. To say the least. To say the least.

How did they take to your apology?

Well, they took me inside, at Special Forces camp,

11:00 then I had a drink of rice wine and blood. They showed me the mechanics of the rice and whatever and it was quite intriguing. It's one of their rituals that they get involved in and it's a pretty potent brew. But every now and then you need a drink. Get through the day. But we ended up going back to that

11:30 Special Forces camp and the Montagnard and we come very friendly and so we seemed to offset the initial harsh delivery. And they were understandable because we eventually had to take some of their dead out. And return them to their original province. You know, and they were understanding and they were very loyal to the Americans and very loyal

12:00 to Australians too. And especially our Training Team guys, very much so.

What were these camps like?

Well, each had their own special characteristics. I think I've been to most of them. Each had their own uniqueness, and Khe Sanh is Khe Sanh and

12:30 probably let me talk about Khe Sanh because Khe Sanh was a, the siege of Khe Sanh took place after our presence, but Khe Sanh again was out of Da Nang towards the North Vietnamese border, west and it was very strategically placed with Special Forces camp and some other colour slides in there. And you can just identify the outer perimeter punji stake component and

13:00 depth of those punji stakes were three times as much as I've seen anywhere else. We were called, same as the 123 Providers, to do some work at Khe Sanh and the weather had set in rather dramatically and we had a full compliment of ammunition on board and there was a mountain north-west of

13:30 Khe Sanh that stuck out above the actual cloud the cloud ceiling and we flew over Khe Sanh and we got onto their FM and asked them what the... There was a perforated steel plating strip, they were capable of handling the Herc and that, you know, big strip at the bottom of this plateau. And we, was eight-eighth cloud gloop

14:00 and so the 123 Providers sort of were balking at it and Doug Harvey, again, I'm just trying to think of the co-pilot's name. But I can see the radio operator, he wasn't too happy. We elected to go to the mountain, put full flap down,

14:30 put the undercarriage down, slide down the mountain, across the valley floor for twenty-three seconds at METO [maximum except take off] power, I beg your pardon, twenty-three seconds and then power out, that's maximum except take off power, on the outbound and hope that we come up onto, there's the mountain, we went down twenty-three seconds across the valley floor, we done a forty-five degree outbound and hoped we'd

15:00 hit the threshold. Again a consensus of opinion was taken in the cockpit to do that. But I tell you what, the six pairs of, six eyeballs on the windscreen in the fog, going across that valley floor. And we missed it not once, we missed it not twice, the Special Forces camp was talking to us, we missed it

15:30 four times. We were going for a last run and we come up. It was, I've got to give the American ten out of ten, he called us spot on. And he called us by degrees, the deviation for the approach. And the last one, the fifth one, we've gone, "Splat!" right in the middle of the threshold, right on target and without any deviation either side of the centreline of the strip. Quite awesome.

16:00 So we done the offload and we put a full complement on and we'd had enough for the day. We were quite mentally exhausted so we got back to Da Nang and a lot of things happened after that. At Khe Sanh. That was quite unique that. Quite extraordinary flying. Extraordinary flying.

Why was it particularly so difficult

16:30 **to land there? Why was it made that way?**

Khe Sanh was a natural, on top of a hill and the mountain was there, the Ho Chi Minh trail was there. That was a strategic at that point in time. A strategic observation platform to see all movements and whatever. And it was a very strategic position from a US point of view and also Vietnamese point of view.

17:00 There's a lot of North Vietnamese movement down the Ho Chi Minh trail and they created their own highways, under the canopies. They'd bring the canopy, they'd tiger tie the canopy and bring it across trees, so you couldn't see anything. And they were very good, at Phu Quoc, we took off out of Phu Quoc and I saw a

17:30 shadow move and strange, I said, "Look, something's going, something moved." And I'm talking about three paddock lengths of the shadow move. I thought it was a cloud, but it wasn't a cloud because there was no clouds in the sky and that's how good these guys were, you know. So we rang Phu Quoc up again, we radioed Phu Quoc and notified them and

18:00 all hell broke loose that night. They were prepared for it, they got out of it, but I tell you what, just for the sake of a blink, of an eyelid they were moving. And that's quite incredible that they had that ability, you know, and it's documented now that they have.

So you saw, a shadow of a massive..?

Yeah,

18:30 they'd blow whistles and blow, you know, codes and they'd move and then when the Caribou banked, they stopped. Bloody extraordinary.

So the whole, section or whatever..?

The whole section moved, all at the one time. Bloody brilliant. Yeah.

And it would stop when you..?

Yeah, mate, I tell you now, I only ever saw it once,

- 19:00 I only ever saw it once and Phu Quoc, they got hit that night. Got hit that night and there's photos in there somewhere of Phu Quoc but then you get onto the good moments in time, where again, you're, as I said the Training Team of people that we'd meet in the middle of nowhere and our, again reinforcing the fact that we were there before the Australian Army got there.
- 19:30 So, to see an Australian in the jungle was something special, because he was something special anyway. You know and specialist training team and those guys were excellent in what they did. And we were up the Ashau Valley and was out at Da Nang and that's where Dasher Wheatley and Butch Swanston were, at that point in time. And there's a photo I've got there with Dasher underneath the
- 20:00 - you've got a quarter tonne truck, with Butch, we- there was some mail there for him and Butch, Dash and I played rugby Union in the service rugby against each other. He was a winger and I was a hooker so needless to say we never made contact with each other. But Dasher was a knockabout good larrikin sort of a guy and so as time goes by, here we are in the middle of nowhere and we meet each
- 20:30 other and that happened in a point in time and in another sad moment, point in time, further down, probably in this discussion, at Tri Bon quite sad, but at that time, we were at Ashau, Ba To rang up, and Ba To was another Special Forces camp and there was some, it was under getting sporadic attack and one of the guys was
- 21:00 bleeding very badly and did we have any plasma? Could we drop some plasma? And Ashau had the plasma, and we automatically said, "Yes." And unbeknownst, there was two Australians there. Now, going back in time, every trip I done to Da Nang or Nha Trang, I always carried a carton of Resch's beer. It was given to us by
- 21:30 Resch's and I kept it for a special occasion, a very special occasion. I could have probably drank it myself. But I didn't, I kept it for a very special occasion. So that carton of blasted cans of Resch's was always up the front in the Caribou and waiting for the right moment. So I got the plasma and I had an airframe fitter with me,
- 22:00 and he now lives in Wagga, this guy and he was a little fella. And a funny little fella. So we worked out after we'd made the offer that a twin-engine transport aircraft is yet to land there, mainly because of the compaction test hadn't been done on the strip. And they've, it's just made of mud, and it's built up out of the rice paddies and whatever, very picturesque place, beautiful
- 22:30 place, very dangerous place too. So I looked at a LOLEX [low level extraction] extraction, palletised extraction. End of the day we were going to break the plasma. Anyway. I said, "Well, why don't we land, Doug?" Doug Harvey again, strange as life goes round at all these special times. "Why don't you land, Doug and just keep the aircraft moving." 'Cause we had low-profile tyres and it could handle
- 23:00 muddy environments and whatever and we'd proven that quite categorically in Papua New Guinea. I said, "You keep the aircraft slowly taxiing, I'll do the runner with the plasma." I said, "Paddy, you jump out of the back of the aircraft and always follow the back of the aircraft where it moves and cover me back." I said, "For Christ's sake don't shoot me." 'Cause when a sporadic comes in the first thing you do is shoot at a moving target
- 23:30 and that's me. So we've done the, we've decided this to happen and Tony Young was the co-pilot. So we've done the landing, we've spun around, I've jumped out, run across the strip, there's a little bit of sporadic fire, but not that much, and so I've jumped into this hole
- 24:00 on the edge of the strip and here's these two Australians. They said, "Worko, what're you doing here?" Said "What're you two bastards doing here?" He said, "Oh we're getting around." I said, "Are youse ever." I said, "Mate, this is special, you know." I said, "Look, here's your plasma, gotta go." I said, "By the way, come out to the aircraft, I've got something for ya." "You
- 24:30 sure?" I said, "Yeah, mate." So we bolted out to the bloody aircraft. Paddy fired one over the back of me head, the silly bugger, frightened the hell out of me. We raced out to the Caribou and I raced in and I pulled out this carton of rusty Resch's beer and I said, "There you go boys." It was the fourteenth of April, 1965. And I said, "There you go boys." They said, "You're kidding?" I said, "No, I'm not, have a good Anzac Day." "Aren't you coming back to pick
- 25:00 us up at Anzac Day?" I said, "You buggers won't be here anyway." And he pushed a nine millimetre submachine gun, a nine-millimetre Schmeisser submachine gun into the, onto the cargo door and he said, "It's yours Worko." I said, "I don't want a nine-millimetre submachine gun. What am I going to do with a submachine gun? Fire it out the back of a plane is like throwing bloody tennis balls at people, you know, wouldn't hit 'em." He said, "Take it." I said, "I don't want it." "Take it."
- 25:30 So God bless Doug Harvey. I've got the helmet on, he coughed, he said, "Excuse me Ron." He said, "Do you intend being much longer?" He said, "It's not very pleasant up here." So here we are in this massive

intense debate and all starting to pick up a bit of momentum and so I said, "Gee sorry, Doug." He said, "We've gotta go." I said, "Understand."

- 26:00 I said, "Piss off, get out me sight." He said, "The Schmeisser." I said, "I don't want it." So anyway, they pulled the lid of the carton of Resch's, I can still see it in my mind's eye, one grabbed a can, the other one grabbed one, one jumped up and clicked his heels. He went, "click," and held the Resch's up in the air and disappeared over the edge. And Doug said, "What on Earth was that all about?"
- 26:30 And I told him. He said, "How much did the Resch's 'cost you?" I said, "Who cares? Twenty bucks, doesn't matter. What's money when you see something like that?" He said, "I'll go you halves." I said, "No you won't." He said, "I'll go you halves." He said, "That was well worth seeing." And to this day, I've spoken to the state president of the Australian Army Training Team, Queensland and he said, "We should write a story about it." I said, "We should." Because I have never seen those guys since.
- 27:00 You know, it's an extraordinary story and so when the seven days attachment finished at Da Nang I do me normal thing, go home, get showered, long socks on, mind me own business, walk up the bar, being by meself, get drunk, have a feed, go home so I can sleep. And it's another day's another day. So then old Doug, he knew what bar I drank at,
- 27:30 and so I'm sitting there and I've had about four barmy bar or something, you know, and next minute this ten dollar note floats down the bar. Little aeroplane. He said, "That's my half." He said, "What're you drinkin' son?" I said, "Well, might have another beer, ay Doug." You know. And so we got plastered and went home.
- 28:00 **What about those Special Forces guys, obviously you were in a bit of danger, having to turn the plane around, what situation were they in?**
- Well that was part of their life, those blokes. They wouldn't, you could bear in mind, we at some Special Forces, we'd rely heavily on a gun truck with M60s on the back of it, a jig with M60s. But there
- 28:30 was no different and the next time we went into Ba To we took a 105. We dismantled a 105 cannon and just was picking up momentum there and we took that in. They assembled it that afternoon and they struck up some extraordinary kills. And strange, as life goes around, and as I was saying to Naomi this morning, the, when I was president of the Gold Coast Vietnam
- 29:00 Veterans Association, the Vietnamese community, invited us up to the other side of Brisbane there, Waco. Darra [Wacol?] for a gathering. And there was Vietnamese soldiers and that there, and unbeknownst to who was present, I was the president, and we walked in there and they were cooking their pigs the traditional
- 29:30 way and it was a traditional day of enjoyment and friendship and we introduced ourselves and then this gentleman came up and he said, "A very special gentleman would like to see you." And I said, "Oh, okay." And he walks up, salutes me, then does the traditional greeting of humbleness and whatever,
- 30:00 and he said, "Major Kinlan, Special Forces Ba To, May 1965." He said, in his Vietnamese accent, he said, "You were on the Caribou that brought the 105 howitzer cannon that saved a lot of lives." I said, "Well I'll be darned." And it turned out, that is a story in itself, we, I said, "That's correct. That is correct." And we became very close. And his
- 30:30 wife and Marge and the family became very close and when I was state manager for Aristocrat as life goes around, I was inducting electronics personnel for the gaming product and I put on this young Vietnamese and I asked him his future intentions and he said he wanted to go to university,
- 31:00 be electronics engineer. I said, "Well, we'll help you in every way." You know. And we left it at that. But he asked for an appointment, I got him these appointments and got him into university and he came to me and he rang the secretary up and he said he'd like an appointment to see Mr Workman. I said, "Well, he doesn't need an appointment, just come up and knock on the door." And oh no,
- 31:30 that's protocol. I said, "Okay, make it one o'clock." And it's the end of his lunch hour, didn't want him eating into his lunch hour. And he's walked up and he said sat down and he said, "I'd like to continue my academic career." And I said, "Fine, I wish you well." He said, "You know my uncle." I said, "Well, I'm not that sure about that." He says, "Yeah Major Kinlan says to say, hello to you." I said,
- 32:00 "Good grief. How is he?" "Fine." And he said, "Major Kinlan told me to tell you that his wife left him for another man." I said, "Well that's very sad, very sad because he had a lovely family." "He also told me to tell you that after his wife left him that he won Go Lotto." So I've cracked up laughing and
- 32:30 I've said, "You tell Major Kinlan, good luck and God bless him." And so as life goes around his daughter had a very bad car accident, got hit by a police car and Marge and I were in intensive care with her for a long while and in the rehabilitation stage and it was just things that happen in life. You know.

Some of the loads that you were dropping.

- 33:00 **Tell us about some of the loads that you were taking in the Caribou?**

Well, the Caribou could take live cattle, obviously, the mountain people obviously don't have refrigeration anywhere. Cattle, livestock, ammunition, weapons, auxiliary power units, everything that was relevant to

- 33:30 a war. Ammunition obviously and flares. Everything that related to the maintenance of the Special Forces camp and the survival of that Special Forces camp and obviously that commitment was replenishment of Special Forces personnel and indigenous personnel. And there were some brutal moments, to say the least and human nature being what it is, it's
- 34:00 an extraordinary subject what one human being can do to the other. You know, and some of the things that I have personally seen and had to carry would, you wouldn't like to see it. You know. But the objectives there, were just to create an environment, those Special Forces camp where they can sustain long-term
- 34:30 attacks as such and they may require a hot excursion or hot incursion or whatever terminology you want to call it, to resupply that Special Forces camp. And that can be by the way of paradrop, LOLEX or landing, depending on the weather. And a lot of people take for granted the weather. The weather played an extraordinary role in the Vietnam era. And it's
- 35:00 the longest war this country's ever been involved in, so there's a lot of things learnt out of it. So we admired the performance of the Caribou and I shall admire to this day, how that aircraft performed in the jungle environment was absolutely extraordinary. And the loads it carried and you know, I've pushed that Caribou right to the end.
- 35:30 And I've had a tonne overweight and that's a sweeping statement. Now, I talk to some of these engineers, they're called flight engineers now, and that's basically what we should have been called to start with and I said all of them have got bad backs and bad knees any wonder. The work they did. But that aircraft and now with the way they're configured, they can't - I think their
- 36:00 constraints are such that they've got to be under their all-up weight no matter what. I used to push the weight in, and the biggest objective was, when you look at the statistics that did take place by way of comparison to aircraft tonne engine weight in the Vietnam era...We made a point of, if I, in Special Forces camps, I'd maximise me outbound, I'd maximise me inbound,
- 36:30 and I'd land all-up weight or apart from your fuel losses obviously. We'd always fill the aircraft up, always. So you're operating with a full complement of whatever. And there are moments which I think we had some good motors and we had some bad motors. And good motors were, they were reconditioned by Pratt and Whitney, and the
- 37:00 bad motors were reconditioned by Spartan whose top options weren't as fine as at Pratt and Whitney. And needless to say the oil consumption which I mentioned the other day, we were burning nine gallons of oil an hour and you're doing outbound for an hour, low level oil warning light come on and you logged that. But I was smoking a cigar at the time. Laying on top of a two drums of high octane and we had ammunition
- 37:30 auxiliary power weapons and I was just smoking a cigar. I was just enjoying the moment. Beautiful Anthony Cleopatra cigar. And Graham Nicholson, we graduated together, he's a pilot, and Nico's first day out in the central highlands and I said, "Nico, keep an eye on that starboard motor, 'cause it's a Spartan." And I said, "The bloody thing'd burn nine gallons of oil an hour. Just log it, let me know
- 38:00 we'll do what we have to do on the way back." And "Righto." So smoking me cigar, and I heard a stray round. And I honestly, you get sick of stray round. Nothing. What the heck? So you'd become rather blasé, which there are times when you do. And so Nico said, "Worko,
- 38:30 that low level oil warning light's come on the port motor. Don't worry about it, I've logged it." And I says, "Righto." I'm laying there and I had another couple more puffs and I said, "Graham come back to me again. Did you say the port low level warning light?" He said, "Confirmed." He said, "Don't worry about it." And I said, "Bullshit." So I said, "That's the brand new motor!" And so I rolled over and the whole
- 39:00 side of the aircraft's splattered with oil. And I said, "Shit. This is not good. Let's look for an alternate straight away." And we were going into Buon Ma Thuot. And it got critical, I must, I mean critical because we'd allowed that quantity of oil to go in T for time. And the (UNCLEAR) head temp came up and I said, "Look,
- 39:30 burn the motor then feather it. But burn it as far as you can." And I start looking for an alternate strip and I said, "Shit's we're in trouble here." And so we feathered the port motor then the Spartan's low level oil warning light come on. So we're down to none. So we feather the port, I've dropped the door, cargo ramp and open the cargo door and he said, "What're you going to do?" And I said, "Let's drop it, we're
- 40:00 going to have to drop the load." I said, "Can you hold?"

Tape 7

- 00:35 Yeah, getting back to that with the starboard low-oil warning light coming on, with the maximum all-up weight that we were carrying at that time, an acceptable loss of altitude is five hundred foot a minute. And we were losing about one thousand foot a minute. We were going down rather fast and so the decision
- 01:00 to eject the load was the only one. So I've done the cut and cut all the restraints and we call for a Pan, a Pan call. Not a Mayday at this point, a Pan call. Buon Ma Thuot, picked the call up and we ejected the load which basically landed in a soft spot near a swamp, which was good, because auxiliary power units were still intact, the
- 01:30 ammunition was intact, the weapons were intact and the fuel was okay. So we landed at Buon Ma Thuot east, and the strip was insecure, was a nice strip, but insecure. So we basically stayed with the aircraft until such time as a Special Forces camp came out to secure the strip. Silly me, I walked over and to the hangar
- 02:00 and picked up the phone and here I am trying to talk dialogue to these Vietnamese to, some Vietnamese, I'm trying to say to them "Viko," we're in trouble, but anyway. It didn't matter, so the Special Forces guys came out and secured the aircraft the strip. And the unfortunate part about it, we were standing up in what we had
- 02:30 apart from our weapons and we were there for another four days. So we couldn't get out. But the Special Forces recovery team, they got ambushed. Quite a few got knocked off and injured, wounded and whatever and so we're staying in their Special Forces camp and when they came back that night, we weren't very popular, to say the least. But they settled down mainly
- 03:00 because of a bit of an indigenous relaxation that caused the problem. But apart from that, the, we had to wait there, but there was something else that was quite important. The, we got ambushed coming in to the Special Forces camp. So somewhere in there I've got a photo of the,
- 03:30 wasn't the road from the airstrip to the Special Forces camp, was quite, you know, straight down jungle, you know, tropical over, canopy and whatever and so it was quite easy to get one at ya and that did happen, and, but, we got out of that one, it was, we had one truck in front of us and one behind us and they
- 04:00 picked up the initial hit, and so we, so that was another day.

What were you doing for four days generally?

Well the other aircraft came in so we basically jumped in and replaced the motor and pulled the engine. With the Caribou, you can put a gantry on top of the main plane and do your own work and pull the motor out. Quick disconnects, bulkhead and cowls off.

- 04:30 Cowls off, quick disconnection, engine out on its engine mountings. Drop that to the floor and new motor in. So that kept us occupied for a couple of days.

What did you eat?

Whatever's going at the Special Forces camp. Anything. But they didn't, they didn't go hungry. The Americans they ate well.

Can you describe the way the Special Forces would set up their camp?

Yeah. Special

- 05:00 Forces camp would be a twelve-man team. Obviously you get commander of Special Forces camp. There was mixed race, white, dark Special Forces camps and they in turn had indigenous personnel. The Special Forces camp was an inner perimeter, an inner perimeter with an inner bunker. A last resort bunker and
- 05:30 with obviously a cachet of ammunition, whatever. And then they'd have, on the inner perimeter, the inner perimeter would be guarded with, if necessary, claymore mines pointing out to the outer perimeter. Where the indigenous personnel were domiciled and then you had the outer, outer perimeter which kept the VC from the indigenous personnel so camped with the American Special Forces.
- 06:00 And on the outer perimeter you had obviously punji stake perimeter with mines, if you had the luxury of having mines. And then there'd be another perimeter if you had the luxury of the barbed wire protecting that, the punji stakes. And then you'd have a strip there somewhere. Some of them were quite sophisticated, and some were
- 06:30 grew through necessity as a result of the intelligence and the...of the VC, they started to, you know, get rather smart.

Did you witness any of the ambushes that happened around that strip?

At Buon Ma Thuot?

While the plane was being fixed.

Oh, no, no, no, no. They catered

07:00 for that. Rather, an aircraft is very valuable. Especially in the Vietnam environment. And that, so that's another subject that's worth talking about. We patched that up. I'd have to go back to me log book, it'd either be a couple of days, three days. I'm not sure. Four days. Four days seems too long for me. Because we could pull a motor out in a day and put the next one in. And that was

07:30 mid-afternoon, yeah, it'd be a couple of days thereafter, we'd be operational again.

What was the feeling like of being stuck there?

Well strange as it may seem you feel quite inadequate. Because you're not a soldier. You're not trained to be aware of the after-

08:00 hours awareness of darkness. The after-hours awareness of penetrations from the VC and whatever and so the, you know, you get, they just, the VC do things just to keep you awake even. You know they'll just create a, you know, with no deep intent, but they just test where the mortar plates are to see if they can get a reaction to the mortar fire. So they'll identify that position, and then hone it in

08:30 and keep a record of that. And they do this and it took a while for, to wake up to that even, that that's what their intentions were. And so when the hit came, the first things that went out were the mortars in Special Forces camps, 'cause they already knew where they were. So whether that be by internal reconnaissance, bad guys being amongst the good guys, but they knew. And they'd even

09:00 turned the claymore mines around, during the night. And face them inwards. And that's happened at quite a few Special Forces camps in Phu Bon. I think Plei Me is another place that became fairly active in the early parts of Vietnam and Plei Me is a, strange as it may seem story, that Mel Gibson was in that, "We were brothers once

09:30 and young" or something [actually We Were Soldiers (2002)]. It turned out I was there, and there was an American Delta company there, it was after I was there. And there was a Workman in that, he got killed. He was there at the same time, shortly after I was there. But Plei Me was starting to get a little bit sensitive and we had a situation where we

10:00 got, we called for smoke and we picked up orange. So there was a bit of movement around and we, God bless the pilot, he had the cockpit windows open. I'm in the middle, we had a US observer navigator, and we've gone over the threshold too hot, we're going too fast,

10:30 he's thumped this bloody Caribou and full reverse pitch. Filled the cockpit full of dust. No one could see where anyone was going. They just went straight off the edge, straight over the side. And quite delightfully, I'd hurt my legs then and I'd done a bit of damage to my legs, but actually I didn't feel it,

11:00 but they departed the aircraft rather rapidly and maybe 'cause of what we had on board. Fairly high profile stuff and so this was about three o'clock in the afternoon, four o'clock and we, I've got out and had a look at the mess we're in, I thought, "Jesus,

11:30 bloody Christ." So I walked up the Special Forces camp, I was bloody sore too and I looked at all the Special Forces guys, the Green Berets, and I said, "I could really do with a hand." And some of them looked the other way, and some of them didn't want to hear me,

12:00 and there was one old fella there who had an absolute crew cut, the number one, and he was as grey as a badger. Now bearing in mind, this is '65. I reckon he's put his age down, to even get to where he was. I reckon, he was an old World War II guy, I reckon. He looked at me, he says, "What do you want me to do?" I said, "Well, I want to back a deuce and a half," that's a two and a half tonne truck, four wheel drive.

12:30 "I want to back that down the mountain, the hill, and I want to cut the nose-wheel steering off. I want to strap that, isolate that, I want to chain both the undercarriage legs, one at one time and then hook up once I spin the aircraft, after I crank the motor up. I'll start the port motor, spin it around, if you can, in unison,

13:00 assist that aircraft with one chain and take it up till I'm level with the strip. Level facing the centre of the strip." He said, "Who's going to do the chain hook up?" I said, "I will. After I've cut the nose-wheel steering." He said, "What do you want me to do?" I said, "Sit in the truck, it's not going to be easy for you." And he says, "It's not going to be easy for you either." And I said, "I know that,

13:30 I've already made up my mind about that." I said, "But we're going to have to get this aircraft before last light, we're going to lose it because of what you've got going around you at the moment." And he said, "I agree with that. It won't be here tomorrow." And so, cut the nose-wheel steering off, isolated it. The chain was a ten-thousand-pound chain so I doubled that, twenty thousand pounds. And cranked the port motor up,

- 14:00 we started it. Gave him the signal. We started to get a bit of activity but the other guys were looking after us a bit and we got level, so I jumped out, hooked the other one up, I only needed one ten-thousand-pound and started the other motor up and we got up on top of the strip, I stopped her and I got the guys to keep
- 14:30 control the aircraft, look after the aircraft's profile. Walk up to the captain of the aircraft and I said, "There's your aircraft, Sir, it's ready to take off." He said, "It's unserviceable." I said, "I'm declaring the aircraft serviceable under combat conditions. You've got fifteen minutes before last light, I'm suggesting, Sir, that you take it off. If you don't take it off, I'll take it off."
- 15:00 "No you won't." And I said, "Well, I can." He said, "It's got no nose-wheel steering, it's unserviceable." I said, "I beg your pardon, you learnt to fly without nose-wheel steering." I said, "It's heel, toe, heel, toe. Heel, toe, heel, toe. And take her off." And so it got a bit physical so in the end, he had a bit of a tear
- 15:30 in his eye, and he took the aircraft off. And we got back to, we had to fly direct from that Plei Me, all the way back to Vung Tau and we got back at some ungodly hour that night. And this is where I go back to the morale changing so dramatically as a result of these guys being with the environment of the aircraft. Those guys worked all night
- 16:00 and fixed all the other damaged skin up and I was in that aircraft at half past six in the morning, quarter past six in the morning and we went straight up to Nha Trang and straight into our Cambodian border, Laotian border obligations again. And so we lost no time. And that to me, was extraordinary Australian ingenuity. They were brilliant and I couldn't, and in the end I couldn't believe it, so we - I had
- 16:30 a few words to say about the situation and, but that's life and it's human nature. You know, human nature is a fascinating subject, especially when it's, you're on the edge, you know, so. And Plei Me was becoming a very sensitive part of the world at that point in time. So that's another moment in time and
- 17:00 then we were up in Da Nang again and you heard me talk about the most enemy-infested valley in Ashau, and in May '65, in October now, there's two enemy-infested valleys in the country and it was Phu Bon, the Valley of Phu Bon. Phu Bon the Special Forces camp was Australian, and there's some deep stories in this. But I'm not going to touch on them. Because that's army.
- 17:30 **Were you involved?**
- No, not in the latter part. So Tri Bon and when Keith Windbank, the guy that run for, committed suicide, he was there and he cranked up a school for the indigenous and the Australians were very good at what they did. And as advisers and they were excellent and they knew how to treat people with (UNCLEAR)
- 18:00 they knew how to make soldiers out of them and Phu Bon was no exception and the, I forget the terminology, it was bestowed upon the Chinese mercenaries, I think there's another name for them. However they were black uniformed people and they were the inner perimeter people, mercenaries, protecting
- 18:30 the Australians from the people within the inner compound. And it was getting bad there, it was getting very bad and so we had a couple of inbounds there that weren't very pleasant and along the way, Dashers now and Butch Swanton, Dasher Wheatley and Butch Swanton, had left Buon Ma Thuot,
- 19:00 they're in Phu Bon. And I said, "Jesus Christ, you get around, Dasher." You know, and so we had a bit of a laugh and carry on. We came back a couple of days later and these Chinese mercenaries, there was thirteen of them, were going on holidays. If there's such a thing as a holiday in Vietnam. They were going back to Da Nang to see their girlfriends, and whatever and
- 19:30 you know. And Dasher's walked up to the submachine gun and he had the, he was really upset. So he ordered them to drop their weapons. And bearing in mind, (UNCLEAR) Wheatley's now a very close friend of ours. He ordered them to drop their weapons. I told him of this. And their
- 20:00 knapsacks; empty their pockets. I said, "Hang on, Dasher." I said, "What're you pulling?" I said, "We've got to get out of here." He said, "Worko, it won't take long." He said, "One of these filthy black bastards has stolen me wallet." And I said, "Well, okay." I said, "Where was your wallet?" He said, "In me bloody pillow with a few other things." And if you knew Dasher. "In my pillow when I was asleep." I said, "That Dasher,
- 20:30 to knock your wallet off while you were asleep, I find very hard to come at." He said, "Nup, it's gone." I said, "Who else'd take it?" He said, "One of these bastards." "It's a pretty hard call." He said, "I don't care." And he was giving them some, he was really giving them a bit of a touch up and I said, "Righto, that's it, mate." He said,
- 21:00 "Well, one of them's got it stuck up their bloody arse." And I said, "Dasher, that's your call. If you want them to do the touch your toes bit, that's fine." I said, "But they're going now." So I put them on the plane. It was very embarrassing to these people and that's one thing you never do to the Oriental people, is embarrass them and that's a lesson I've learnt beforehand. And so these guys jumped on board, took

21:30 the back to Da Nang and my circumstances changed and I returned home. And I was working my way, Marge and I we went to Wagga for our R and R, for our, on me return from the tour of duty and we'd been to Griffith wine tasting and we got back to Marge's mother's place and Dasher

22:00 was killed. So he'd come the hit time, that was on November the thirteenth, '65. Situations revolving around that were quite sad. And no one knows the full story.

What kind of a man was he?

Dasher? A good soldier. He was a good soldier. And Butch was a good soldier. They're both good soldiers, they both had their own

22:30 completely different personalities. Butch was a good guy, nice, soft, straight. Dasher was a bit more flamboyant and dasher by nature. And you know and he was a soldier, good soldier, he stayed till the end, you know. That was it. He was good.

23:00 I'm just wondering if you can describe Da Nang for me?

Da Nang? Yeah. Da Nang was a capital city or a northern capital city. Wasn't a capital city, it was a major city just prior to the North Vietnamese border. The military compound was massive, and

23:30 in saying that it was massive, the air power that they had there for North Vietnam insertions was incredible. And so the sleep you got was quite chequered because of the Phantom aircrafts were striking twenty four hours a day into North Vietnam, and so the fire power there was probably

24:00 the largest in the world at that point in time. And just covering the outer perimeter of that, the aerodrome defence guards had a hard job, and they...We had some funny moments, you know. We had some extraordinarily funny moments and you make the best of those funny moments. A flying suit in there, where I flying. It's a Marine

24:30 from Guam flying suit. And the four-man crew that I had with me, there was Dave Cooper and Bluey Lane, Freddy Morthorp and meself, we made a point of, once we'd landed at Da Nang to go to and outpost where we knew we could have a beer and keep away from the Skull and Crossbone Club and whatever, and so we've

25:00 gone out there and there was these four navy guys, flying Neptunes, come in from Guam. So we're drinking away and playing up a bit. Drinking and laughing and carrying on, and we're talking football comparisons to gridiron and all the other stuff, and so bearing in mind, we'd been away for six days, we were just ready to come back to Vung Tau and we're talking about tackling and how the Americans tackle. I said

25:30 they couldn't tackle. And so this is going on, he says "Well, man, I'll guarantee you I can get from that end of the hall to this end of the hall and go past you." I said, "Oh fair enough." I said, "What's the bet?" And he said, and we stank, that's how bad we were, we stank, our flying suits were full of BO [body odour] and we were rotten, and he said,

26:00 "We'll swap flying suits." I've looked at Dave Cooper and I said, "Well, that's a fair go." And this bloke was a bit of a lump of a bloke. And I've said, "Righto. Your call. Start running." So I put me beer down, I got in the middle of the hall, so this was a big moment of entertainment this was. So there's Special Forces guys, blokes in camouflage

26:30 gear on, so they're all standing on chairs and everything. So this bloke come down a hundred mile an hour. I've just crutched him and I've just gone straight up and down. Went over and drank me beer. I said, "Jesus, he was heavier than I thought he was." So the whole place erupted and so there's photos somewhere in the world, of us exchanging flying suits. And that flying suit in there, I picked the captain, 'cause he's

27:00 my size. But it wouldn't fit me. But it's there hanging off the door. So there's a magnificent colour slide here that here we are, in the middle of nowhere, standing outside the Caribou, all in these brand spanking new fawn flying suits from Guam. It was a classic, it was a classic. That was a fun moment, but it was too easy a tackle. He come straight -

27:30 look, it was a joke. But it was a funny moment.

Whereabouts would you stay in Da Nang?

Right in the middle of the operation, on the strips, they had huts that were figure H huts, you know, figure blocks. And the toilet, ablution blocks were in the middle so they'd access them. And so as I mentioned earlier, we were staying with the engross and pretty interesting 'cause they were triple bunks and

28:00 we'd all be in this little niche and "Hey Ron, look at, this is my boy." You know, little piccaninny there. And you know "He's a good kid." These little piccaninnies and Negros. It was great. They're good people and good aircrew people too. So we had a great rapport with them and we got on well. And I outdrank a Yank one night.

- 28:30 And this bloke, he, I don't know, what happened, he picked me out in the crowd, for some reason or another and the CMC [chairman of the mess] of the mess was a Negro. He was about six-foot-one, three, four. He was big man and a good guy. And we'd introduced ourselves on the first time we were up there and he was one hell of a nice guy. So
- 29:00 you know, after a hard day's work, you don't need any harassment, you don't need anything. All you need to do is just have a beer, have a meal and just get ready for tomorrow and that's it. Make sure your aircraft's always refuelled that night, which is most important and so this guy walked up and he said, "Are you an Aussie?" I've got Australia all over me flying suit, you know, stupid question, and I said, "Yes, as a
- 29:30 matter of fact, what makes you say that? I am." He says, "I heard you guys can surf boards." Richard Fowley [Midget Farrelly?] was around, surfboard champion, Australian surfboard champion. I said, "What's that got to do with me?" He said, "You surf?" I said, "Yes, I surf." "Surfboards?" I said, "Yes." "Can you drink?" I said, "I have the occasional drink." Then he yelled at me,
- 30:00 real southern Alabama big mouth, you know. He said, "I guarantee I can outdrink you." I said, "Really, that really doesn't take me anywhere." I said,, and then he went on and on and I'm trying to work out, this other guy that I was with, and so I said, "What's it going to prove?" He says, "You name your poison and then I'll name mine."
- 30:30 I said, "Righto." So I walked up to the CMC, he was a Negro, I said, "What's the strongest beer you got?" He said, "San Miguel." I said, "Okay." I said, "We'll have a beer." Beer and this guy's drinking Scotch. Which I didn't mind a scotch, so scotch. So San Miguel then I changed the beer to
- 31:00 another potent Japanese beer. And scotch. Then we started again, scotch. So this went on and on and so I put my hand up, I said, "What's up?" I said, "Toilet? Sam C, you okay. Toilet." I go to the toilet, hand down the throat, "bleegh". The CMC saw me and he looked at me, he winked at me and he's
- 31:30 smiling, he's trying to keep a straight face and I've washed me mouth out and come back in and I said, "Jeez, I'm thirsty." You know. And drank again. Drinking again and this Yank's falling off the planet, he fell of the table so we put him back. He's standing on the table, put him back up on the table, you know another hour and a half went so, "Toilet break." "Yeah." Hand down the throat, "bleegh". Wash me mouth out. Cleaned meself up and walk in again and "I'm really thirsty now."
- 32:00 "Have another beer. San Miguel." "How about Japanese beer. Got any Korean beer?" So it went on and on and this guy, just collapsed, broke the chair, fell down and I said, "You can't help bad luck, can you mate?" And all the Yanks cracked up laughing, because apparently he was an absolute pain in the arse to everyone in the whole mess and you know, he's just one bloke that's just an absolute pain
- 32:30 and so we held our heads high after that and to this day, the old CMC he says, "Hey Ronny," he said, "That was pretty cool." He said, "Dinner's on me tonight." I said, "I don't think I could eat a thing." And from there on we had a great rapport with the Negroes and that. And I think they're great people.

What was your general impression of the American troops?

- 33:00 There were some very special soldiers there. And there were some very special, special operation soldiers. And I'm a life member of that association, the Special Operations. And a life member of the Air Commandos. So there were some very, very quality people there and very, very good at what they did.
- 33:30 And having said that, I've also seen some stupid things done too. Not by that section of people, but I've seen silly decisions made in combat by probably inexperienced officers that were quite embarrassing and quite funny. And that was sad. And life can be so cheap at times,
- 34:00 in long distance and I've seen that happen more than once. And so in every aspect, my regard for the quality of Americans is quality opinion and I have the same opinion of the Australian Training Team and also the Australian soldier, he's one of the best in the business. And somehow or other it's in everybody, there's that little bit of Anzac in everybody.
- 34:30 It's in you, it's in Kiernan, and somehow or other when the chips are down and it's called upon you'd be surprised. There's something dormant in there that comes to the fore and really lifts to the occasion, it's quite incredible.

What sort of qualities do you think that is?

It's calculating, it's not impulsive, it's calculating, but it's survival instincts,

- 35:00 it's, and once it gets past that edge it's quite ruthless too. And there comes a time where time does stand still where you pause with that deliberate decision that you have to make, you know, and I thank God it's never happened to me too often. But there are times. Where you pause and dwell and time does stand still. Before you
- 35:30 make the decision. Because you're a human being, you don't like seeing anybody in any way harmed. And that's what I said about the evacuation of Kham Duc, you know, it was very hard and also the 41 mission, you know, with the knife.

What sort of thoughts go through your mind to make that kind of a decision?

Well, somehow or other you think you've, you look, you think,

36:00 and then you, then it comes back to your self "Mate, I'm gone here. So you're not going to get me without a fight."

How do you think making a decision like that changes you?

Well it does. It does. Certainly does change you. And the next one that happens, the next time it happens, it's a lot easier because you know at the end of the day it's a real

36:30 time issue. It gets easier, but it's not easier. It is easier to make the decision, but it's a hard decision to make.

Is it frightening that it gets easier?

Yeah, it is. You know, there comes a time also where you start wanting to be involved in more sort of tightrope action too, you know it's a strange

37:00 sort of a thing you keep on wanting to get to the edge again, you know. I wanted to go back to Vietnam but somehow or other that didn't happen. And I don't know how it happened. I ended up pruning the CO's roses for about a year. And that really aggravated me. That got me the shits. Somehow or other my posting

37:30 after I'd done the chief instructing for a couple of years, I ended up at a depot. You know, here I was an operational person, stagnating in a depot. And I couldn't think of anything worse. So I'm doing time and motion study for all air force personnel in the Royal Australian Air Force. It took this old warrant officer a week and a half, it took me three days,

38:00 and I was just absolutely bored and that's how I come to learn how to love roses. So something beautiful come out of it. So up until the last drought here, I had fifty six roses in my gardens and I used to, every Friday afternoon, I used to cut a dozen roses for the CO, for his wife, and I used to cut two dozen for my darling over here. She always got a bunch of roses. And

38:30 I enjoyed roses. So what happened there, I told the CO, I said, "This is crazy." And then they promoted me and I said, "I still don't want to stay here." So strange as it may seem, I put in for a religious course. Now you know how religious I am, being a congregational and he looked at me and he says, "You have got to be kidding." I said, "Anything to get out of this depot." He said,

39:00 "You're going to sit in a religious configuration for three weeks." And I said, "If it takes, yeah." He said, "At Wagga?" I said, "Yes, my wife comes from Wagga." And I said, "It's basically going to be a bloody holiday." And so as life goes around, the fiftieth anniversary of the armistice, was of the end of World War One, was cranking up

39:30 and my commanding officer, who I flew with in Vietnam, he tracked me down, and I was the only air force person in the Australian contingent colour party. A very unique honour. And it turned out, two of the training team guys were in it, Don Donkin who was in Khe Sanh and Danny Neville who got a Military Medal and Tiny Hill,

40:00 who I played rugby union against. He was an All Black rugby union player and this mad New Zealand Navy Seal [SEa, Air, Land]; he was a throat cutter he was an absolute lunatic. So that's the five of us in the colour party and so our training required us to be at Holsworthy army camp. So needless to say I was playing first-grade football and

40:30 so everyone was waiting for me to get to Holsworthy to learn how to march. Air force people could march and quite good. But all these guys were ex-Training Team guys and so there was a bit of a joke going on, and so they're sweating on me, so the whole contingent turned up and Doug Harvey had the, also the unique honour, of being the commander of that Australian contingent, who was

41:00 our CO in Vietnam. And so here we are again in different configurations and so we went to Paris and met President De Gaulle, and we went to every battlefield in France and the whole catafalque party as tough as they were, this old British colonel in his deliberations of what took place in all these battles, and they had us in tears. Some of the things that happened, it was incredible. And so we were in this little French bus, and every morning the catafalque party got priority over anything and when the world colours were displayed everyone had to stand to attention, obviously, and so we were staying at this Napoleonic fort, and so we'd have our red wine for breakfast. Bacon and eggs with red wine and so we'd got to our points of...

Tape 8

00:30 **We were just talking about the leaflets, tell us the story behind that.**

Well Ranch Hand started around about 1962 but it picked up momentum obviously as the Vietnam era picked up momentum with more induction of troops and that. So defoliation was,

- 01:00 the Ranch Hand was the terminology given to the defoliation program, and we, with the air mission commitment, which was the same as the 123's and the 315 Air Commando group, we were a part of the leaflet drop program, which basically required us and other
- 01:30 air force crews, Australian Air Force crews to fly low-level and broadcast these pamphlets. And the pamphlet content was a fairly big, broad pamphlet, but it had a skull and crossbones on it, had "Didi mohem," which was "Please relocate out of the area," and brought attention to the fact that, in Vietnamese language obviously, that defoliation was
- 02:00 due to commence and it asked to relocate out of the area. Reposition themselves out of the area. But the sincerity of that type of broadcasting, was met with the question, a physical response by way of enemy ground fire, and the question was, "Why are you defoliating that area to start with?" And the answer is, "Because the
- 02:30 enemy are there." So here you are, going into a hotbed, dutifully broadcasting these pamphlets, "didi mohem," with a skull and crossbones and all hell's broken loose. So the back of a Caribou delightfully, like broadcasting rose petals out the back of the plane and getting your arse shot at. And it wasn't nice, I can tell you, and the crisscross pattern of the 123's, which was in the end the sequence was
- 03:00 quite swift after that. So you basically did not have much time to relocate anyway. So, and in the end, to be very frank, I used to kick the whole bucket out and hope to shit it fell on someone and killed it. 'Cause that's how bad it was, it was stupid. It was crazy. And for me to do that and not be dutiful in my job, that's how insane it was. So whether it be a high altitude leaflet drop or anything,
- 03:30 ours was a low level, concentrated broadcast of these pamphlets. And I should have brought one home and I should have dropped it on the table of the Royal Commission into Agent Orange, because it certainly did take place. But having said that, the same 120 RIs who were based at Binh Thuy, also were involved in a pesticide program using the same bins that was used in the herbicide program. So there's residual herbicides there and pesticides mixed together,
- 04:00 and what the heck, you're still killing something aren't ya? You're killing the foliage that the insects are in and so at that point in time in history the herbicidal component, after-effects was not known. Was not known to us anyway. But yeah, I get blisters, I get rashes. And I can probably say quite sincerely that there's a lot of other people do also. So being a part of that as
- 04:30 an alderman, mainly because the Royal Commission was held on the Gold Coast at the Gold Coast city council chambers, I wasn't going to participate but I think the mayor and Nan Dwyer, the PR lady, insisted that I participate and I had these rashes that bad, all over me, that, whereas Nan Dwyer and Graham Lambert,
- 05:00 the Gold Coast city council photographer, they took a biopsy of my back, they took a, cut a big chunk out of my back and they came and took a photo of the scar that it made with the suture still inserted in there and Marge's finger pointing at the scar on my back. Veterans review board questioned the fact that
- 05:30 how did they know that was me? I said, "I beg your pardon?" They said, "That could be anybody's back." And I said, "I am astounded that I am sitting here, listening to you at a Veteran review board, comments as to an actual fact that took place, and I was an alderman of the Gold Coast city council, with the head of PR [public relations] lady
- 06:00 there, the Gold Coast city council photographer, and my wife's finger, endorsing the situation. And you question the ethics of that." I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, please excuse me." I got up and walked out. Bloody insulting. Anyhow so the Royal Commission was an absolute recognised flop, mainly because the Royal Commission didn't want to recognise the truth.
- 06:30 And as history unfolds itself, that's the exact truth of what happened. Anyway, you may want to talk about something else, I'm not sure.

Just clear it up for me, how did you come into contact with the agent orange?

The missed patterns. You know, if it rains, it rains. And if there's wind, there's drift, and if

- 07:00 there's anything like that and there's no such thing as the perfect environment, the drift pattern is taken into consideration but we had windscreen wipers on and on a nice blue sunny day. But that's nothing. That happened. And the people at that point in time, in 1980, didn't want to accept that, what's that fifteen years, twelve years after the war,

- 07:30 '82, '85.

Has there been any effects on your family?

No, and I'm fortunate in the fact that we had our children before I did go to Vietnam. But there have certainly been other incidences, and three of our crew chiefs have died of cancer. And died at a young

death. Died young, and we've buried Bob down here.

08:00 Hank passed away in Sydney and he was a young man, and Marlo, so yeah, there's a strong indication there. And I'm just fortunate that I'm allowed to be sitting here I suppose. Although I've got a chest situation which I can live with, but apart from that, no drama.

08:30 As I said before, crew chiefs get bad legs and bad backs, and that's all this crazy stuff you get involved with back on aircraft when it matters, you know.

And did you see the effects of the defoliant on the areas?

Yeah.

Describe that for us.

Well, it's barren. Quite barren, no life at all.

09:00 And it certainly was effective. And the rapidity of it, swiftness of it, was more so effective, you know, more so impacting I should say.

When you said they used to give leaflets, how quickly after the leaflet drops was the defoliant dropped?

All depends where they were in the pattern. But they'd be doing a pattern run

09:30 in our presence in another area and that's fair enough. That other area may be a couple of clicks, three clicks away but no matter what, you pick up drift and that wasn't a significant worry to us, you know, it didn't, but the drift was there and depending on your commitment, you know.

Did they communicate any other way, other than leaflets, to the locals?

10:00 No. Not that I know of. There's no other way because it was such a sensitive little area or areas, and they certainly did some experimenting with the different types of defoliation.

Was there any discussion or talk about the fact that maybe some of the people couldn't read or wouldn't get the message?

10:30 Nup. No. And again, no, not that I know of.

And in the Caribou, what kind of defences did you have from attack?

None. We didn't have parachutes, I think

11:00 the most motivating aspect of the Caribou was that we had a nice thick keel underneath the semi-monocoque construction, and if you crash landed, the keel'd keep you straight and there was two other keels either side of it, so when she rolled, you'd have a nice straight on-going slide I suppose. But no, there was nothing there, apart from your own weapons that you had.

11:30 **What weapons did you have?**

I carried an M14 because it had a bit of grunt in it and I used tracer a lot, because tracer would start, you know, you'd get a visual impression. So I used tracer every round. And that's bend the barrels out obviously, so I'd change weapons every whenever, and tracer, and I used an ordinary rounds and depending on your circumstances how many clips you

12:00 got, mate. And in the 45 that I carried, I made a point of using tracer in that. Which was effective. It was good. But that was all. And every now and then I used to let a grenade go, which wasn't policy I must admit. But it was effective.

12:30 And because, things happen. We won't go there.

How would you set yourself up to fire a weapon?

I'd have a harness on. As I said, in the evacuation of Kham Duc. I generally would always have a harness on me. And side doors open, cargo door open,

13:00 and I'd use both doors and the rear door. That's all you had.

How would you conduct a drop of equipment where you weren't landing?

The LOLEX. There's two methods: the LOLEX or high extraction. And LOLEX is, they're both a result of pendulum action or release of a parachute

13:30 from a bomb rack. The LOLEX is a more sensitive sort of departure where everything's on rollers and palletised and depending on the object or objects and the straightness of the extraction, they were successful, and it all depends on the movement of the aircraft too, you know, and a little bit of a cross movement or something or tail movement. That parachute'll want to take it out in a

- 14:00 straight line. Tear the arse out of the side of the plane and that can happen. And low level, obviously undercarriage down, just in case, for numerous reasons and we'd, you know, the timing was very sensitive, and that related to how well the cargo was tied down with the knife action from the extraction.
- 14:30 So all your tie-down restraints are cut in sequence and I've seen the American load team have a malfunction with an incorrect tie-down procedure, he lost the plane. That's how severe it was. So that sequence, you checked that before you were even accepted as a crew chief. That was a major, major,
- 15:00 major. So that type of extraction was a sensitive one. And if you're doing a high drop, same pendulum action. And we had a malfunction there. We had to modify the bomb racks. They were done in Australia before the next batch went over I think, because I was there when we had the malfunction. But that high drop was cattle, star pickets, ammunition.
- 15:30 We'd be very conscious of, we'd do that in a LOLEX. But cattle and anything that was not VA, valuable attractive item. So cattle was an experiment that needed a few modifications because the actual deployment action, of the parachute and the severity of the snap, basically tore the
- 16:00 crate that the bull or the cow was in and it just cartwheel into the ground. But it was still fresh meat. So they got their meat, one way or the other. But preferably on the hoof. So in the end, no matter what, you tried and if you could. Some places you couldn't.

Was this an unusual activity, parachuting out cattle?

- 16:30 No, we'd have chickens, we'd have everything. Pigs. Again, it was a part of the military agreement that the Americans had with the Vietnamese and whatever and it was a lovely luxury. But every now and then the wicker baskets were not made to be hurtling around the skies,
- 17:00 and so we'd do a package and every, by way of design, they amended, we rectified the problems and that was quite successful in the end, apparently. But every now and then a bull went loose.

And you mentioned that sometimes when you'd have to land there might be a problem or something of that order. Did you carry equipment to fix..?

Yeah, I had basically a, I had a little fly-away kit

- 17:30 and quite honestly, the ability of the Pratt Whitney motor, and I have nothing but absolute regard for the technology and design of that motor. And the aircraft itself, and the strength of that aircraft and the environment that it operated in consistently one hundred percent
- 18:00 effectively. There's nothing around in the world that could even match it, to this day, they're still struggling. That's why the Caribou's still operational. And I just feel that having been in Papua New Guinea and Vietnam and seeing what it can do, in all the most extraordinary weather patterns, mud strips, PSP [Perforated Steel Planking],
- 18:30 slipping and sliding on PSP and in combat, there's nothing around. Certainly outclassed the 123 Provider. More effective in its operations. I cannot give it any more of a glowing tribute than that and even to see them still alive today. Is an endorsement of its character.

You mentioned earlier about using chewing gum. Were there any innovations that you had to do out in the field to fix things?

Yeah, where do you want to start?

The most unusual maybe.

Quite frankly, I, we never really,

- 19:30 there were just times where we patched up and got out of the place and so if it required getting out and then feathering, I'd feather. But you know we had a line shot out. A fuel line. A primary line it was and we're right in the middle of, it was in the Long Hais, in a rubber plantation,
- 20:00 and Doug Harvey was there. I must have flown a lot of times with Doug. And we, I just accepted, put it this way, I'll tell you something now, if you can imagine the augmentor tubes, the exhaust pipes of a Caribou, going over the top of the main plane. It's raw exhaust, and on the front of that is your motor. And the
- 20:30 front of that motor, or the back of that motor, in the wheel case, I had a primary line going to a fuel pump that picked up a bit of shrapnel, just a little bit, and it cut. Cut it. And I couldn't fix it. Well the fuel pump dropped its main seal and it was venting so that gave me raw fuel underneath the flap where the augmentor tube came over and raw fuel was pumping, raw exhaust was pumping out. And I looked at Doug and
- 21:00 I'm trying to think. We knew this rubber plantation was going to get hit because we knew the guy, he was of another nationality, I won't say what, was aiding and abetting and we knew when it was going to get hit. So did the natives. So did the indigenous people, they weren't natives, they were indigenous people. And ours was a last minute call in before we went back to

- 21:30 Saigon and I said, "We'll put the full complement on board, I'll take the lot. But I won't, I shouldn't say that, I'll take as many as I can." And you know, you have some sad moments in your life, you wouldn't believe this, come the cut-off, the guy that I cut off was an absolute cripple. He was a cripple. And I said, "beaucoup sing loi,
- 22:00 beaucoup sing loi." That means, "I'm terribly sorry, you can't come." And he's crying and carrying on and throwing himself at the ramp door and Doug said, "Ron, what do you want to do?" I said, "Doug, I've made a decision, I can't back off, mate." I said, "Doug, we're going to take that aircraft off, knowing in mind, you've got a fuel leak, you've got your, you'll have your flaps down
- 22:30 for your take off and then soon as we get airborne I want you to feather the motor, so you're going to be hanging on one. You're still going to be fuel venting out of that port-side motor, if it's going. And sorry." I said, "Now, if you want to start it up before you land, that's fine, but when you start up and land, you better make it flapless or don't start it at all. 'cause you have that eddying of fuel
- 23:00 can come up in and.." I said, "It'll blow your wing off, you're gone. You're a shot duck." So we left the cripple behind and this gentleman came up and insisted safe passage to Saigon, before this, and we knew the circumstances. I said, "You're on the far queue fella. You will not get on this aircraft."
- 23:30 And he said, "We'll see about it." I said, "No you won't." I said, "The decision is made. We knew your circumstances and you're on the far queue." And Doug said, "Are you okay?" I said, "I'm okay." So anyway, he stayed there. That place never existed the next day, it was gone that night. But the, we took that...
- 24:00 To answer your question, yeah, that happened. A decision that you make you're calculated one and yeah, we got airborne, we feathered and we landed with it feathered. And that's how it was. A pretty good job.

How did you deal with the fear of dying in these situations where..?

I don't know I just didn't. It's a strange question that. You know, I used to take off in the

- 24:30 morning and Walter [Adrian] Cronauer, he, you know, "Good Morning Vietnam." He'd take off and the sun was just coming up and you're saying, "Well what's going to happen to me today? And I wonder if I'll get home tonight?" And it's no use putting tea on 'cause, I don't know if I'm going to have. You know, strange things, you think. And fear, I think they overcome fear by leaving fear behind
- 25:00 you, and I've always said that, don't dwell in it. You make your decision and you do it. And it works, every now and then. And there's always fear. It's just, as I said earlier, Doug taught me personally, how to handle sadness and handle fear. And I adopted his approach to that. You know and he's

25:30 pretty good.

We've talked a lot about Doug, just tell us what he meant to you? What kind of figure was he?

Well he was a father figure to me. Absolutely. And we had a lot of respect for each other too. But we flew planes together and Doug and I, he said, "Go on, get in the left seat. I know you bloody well want to have a fly." And I "Gee thanks Doug, about time, you know." We had

- 26:00 this sort of humour amongst us and yeah, I'd fly, I'd land, there'd be no problem. Basically as I said, I learnt to fly Caribous on the way back from Canada, 'cause that was a long, long trip and no autopilot, plus or minus two hundred feet to start with, where I got her down to plus or minus ten. I fell out of the sky, you know, you just learn, trim it out properly. Especially with those internal fuel tanks, you know.
- 26:30 But it was a great experience, I'd do it again.

Were there times where you'd have to take people who were shot up or casualties on board?

Yeah, all the time. Plasma, drips, a lot of dead, wounded, armless, legless, bowel problems, like shot out and that was

- 27:00 part of your attachment life, when you were up in an operational side of it, yeah. All the time, yeah that was part of life.

Were there any occasions which were particularly hard to deal with?

I think talking about Snow was, that was pretty tough. He was a good mate of mine and, the others, by way of the intensity of the moment, and initially, no. And so it's only

- 27:30 when you're in flight, in transit, where things happened to bodies which shouldn't happen to bodies and you. And silly things that people give to people whilst you are in transit. And the, you know, I had a bloke shot up to pieces and this, I had him on plasma. I had seventeen drops a minute, blah, blah, blah and this bloody Vietnamese give him a drink of coke. There was Coca-cola
- 28:00 flowing everywhere out of him. So I've had to smack him on the hand. Yeah, there's some crazy things. Crazy things that make you dwell on how cheap human life is, you know. Some of the things that you

see. Heads cut off and issues like that. Which you don't like seeing.

And are they

28:30 **hard things to deal with at the time?**

Of course they're bloody hard to deal with, I think. I have the occasional problems in the night time. And anyone that says, you know... I don't know what my log book says but I think it was one thousand, one hundred and fourteen operational missions in a very severe operational environment and I believe, I still have

29:00 what you call a pretty unnecessary nightmare at times. I just get up and wash my face, go for a walk around the house and get it away from me and you go back to bed if you can. And whoever says, what did they used to say? "Time heals all wounds." Whoever said that's an absolute bloody liar.

29:30 It doesn't work that way.

Are there any recurring themes in these dreams?

Oh yeah. Snow, the knife, the bodies, in the aircraft. I think the hardest thing about it, you try and restrain

30:00 bodies without body bags. You know, you do the thirty tie-down restraint and vertical restraint and as soon as you put pressure on, you're putting on a pressure on a body that's got holes in it all over the place, you know, and it makes you bloody cry, you know, so you're trying, in the end you're talking to these poor things you know, and that's the hardest thing about it. And so in the end you become pretty bloody tough and ruthless and emotionally strange, I think, yeah,

30:30 you never really get over that. You know, I found it very, it wasn't easy to do and it still isn't easy to talk about I don't suppose.

Would you have to conduct any first aid to people on board?

Yep. I took some kids out of Tamki, and she...

31:00 I had to, a pretty tough call. Yeah, forget that one. No, forget that.

And where would you take them to?

I took them back to Da Nang, yeah. What happened, this bloody lunatic he, they were playing cards at the Special Forces camp and the kids were playing, just like little mountain kids, you know, they're playing and that,

31:30 and apparently he lost his pay or some darn thing. These are Vietnamese bloke and he pulled a grenade and blew up the whole bloody school....The card school. And blew half the kids away and so we, there's a thing on the wall in there. I tried to give this kid mouth to mouth and her bloody top lip was blown off and I didn't know in the urgency of the moment.

32:00 I was trying to keep her alive, but she passed away on the way. So plus her mother and the other kid had his arm blown off. Yeah, you try your darn best and it's not a, people don't realise the, that pain is lingering and also the fact that the wound they so receive is not a normal

32:30 thing. It's a severance, it's a tearing away and to apply any type of assistance is quite difficult, very difficult. Belts, just, knots, fingers in the dyke, you know, fists in the dyke, it's not easy. Blood all over you and they still die anyway. But you try, you try your hardest.

What would you do after an experience like this?

33:00 **Like when you got back to base?**

I'd try and get the blood out of me gear and go and have a drink, (UNCLEAR) hope to Christ you can sleep. But that was a day a part of a day and part of a moment and you just accept that and get ready for the next day but if you carry the problem from one day into the next day,

33:30 you've got a problem. 'Cause, in the end it won't work. So I just tried to immunise myself in some form or another, whether that be by alcohol or whatever, which is part of the process obviously, and it was necessitate getting into a fight just to vent yourself, that was alright by me. I can handle that. And

34:00 get ready for the next day.

How do you go back after seeing something horrific?

Every day is different, mate. Every day is different. More than you realise. So yeah, I think you just get used to it. I think also, there's a time where you go through a threshold where you

34:30 become totally operational. And you do somehow or other block all of the emotional side of it out. And - I'm trying to explain it, so that you can get through the day and the next day and a stretch of seven days

straight, six days straight but so that you get into a habit of in the end, of doing it all the time. Which is not that bad.

35:00 And that's about it.

And how does that stop once you finish your tour or go on..?

Oh it didn't. I came back, I was sillier than ever. But I was a pretty wild boy in those days and did a fair bit of everything; misbehaving and playing up, drinking. Wouldn't come home for a couple of days,

35:30 three days and I'd ring Marge up, I said, "Are you cranky?" She'd say, "Where are you?" I said, "Are you cranky?" She said, "Where are you? I said, "I'm not going to come home unless you say you're not cranky." And she said, "Okay, I'm not cranky." So I put the phone down walked round the corner and walk in the house. But we had some, like every other veteran, we had some tough times of adjustment

36:00 and I think Marge'll, she said, "You weren't the boy you went away, was a lovely person, now you're a different one." Which is, that's understandable and, but we, I drank a hell of a lot and playing rugby league also sort of allowed me to vent myself, you know and pretty physically, and still didn't get the Australian jumper.

36:30 But I don't know, I'd say, I joined the air force for a reason. I went to Vietnam for a reason to help wherever I could. The job we done was a very professional job and we were very professional in what we did and that's why I've packaged a submission on behalf of the RAAF transport flight, 35 Squadron. It's a complete submission and we've sent to

37:00 America for a consideration by the American government to offer the same bestowal of awards that were offered to the 315th Air Commando Squadron. And that's currently with a congressman and the Air Commandos. Gene Russell, who is their national public relations officer, and we are also currently

37:30 looking at a motion going out to state congress to allow the national RSL to investigate anomalies and outstanding awards that could be bestowed upon units that were not recognised in the Vietnam campaign. So there are quite a few. Something's happening down there but we want to, I want to

38:00 do a class action, to embrace all the ground crew and all the aircrew that were there from 1964 to 1972. You know the first squadron into Vietnam and the last squadron out. And they got zilch and yet they went places that angels fear to tread, they went places that was incredible. So to me, it's taken

38:30 me around about six or seven years of my life just packaging little thing together and the submission is poised at a federal level that we seem to think there is a problem. That we seem to think we may be able to overcome it.

39:00 So next question.

I was interested in the fact that you were involved in the early part of the war. Over your tour did you see a lot change in the..?

The build up in '65 was rather dramatic you know, and so did the enemy activity become rather dramatic. So I think from the time I got there, it was already in place,

39:30 the intent, and we knew there was going to be a coup on. Which did take place. General Ky took over. Although it was soft coup, it was a bloodless coup, and so it was optional, our job was effectively unchanged.

Tape 9

00:31 **You came home from Vietnam in October?**

Yeah, middle of October, seventeenth, eighteenth of October or something.

What were the circumstances surrounding you coming home?

None. I got off the aircraft as a three-man crew. My wife

01:00 picked me up. I had children and we went down to Tuross Lakes. So there was no detox, or what was ever put in place for veterans on their return at that point in time. And I sorted myself out in a roundabout way and I got to Tuross Lakes and I was ten-stone,-four. I went

01:30 away as first grade footballer at around about thirteen-four. I'd lost a bit of weight but I was fit, agile, so I felt great, you know and that's understandable, you lose that much weight. And I looking for a place to stay and this guy come up and he said, "You want accommodation?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "There's none." He said, "But you can have mine." He said to me, "Where have you been, you're brown?"

02:00 I said, "I've just come out of Vietnam." He says, "Really?" He said, "You can have my unit." I said, "You're kidding?" And he said, "No, I'm not." He said, "There's the keys. It's overlooking Ulladulla. Have a good time, when you're ready to go, just hand the keys back." So we had a great time, you know. It was good for the kids and that so we had the Labrador dog with us and

02:30 we eventually worked our way back to the, to Wagga, where Marge's parents was and we went wine tasting and that's where we went to the John Darian Club in Griffith and met Al Grassby. And Al was a very colourful man in parliament at that time and I was just saying to my wife's brother-in-law that the

03:00 circumstances and, he had the area news, Paul Jones at that time. And he, I only said it as a passing point, you know, that it's good to get something to eat three times a day. And you know, he got me to expand upon it and next minute Al Grassby came over and he said, "Talk to me about it." And I did. I told him exactly what wasn't happening.

03:30 And he said, "I can't accept that." And I said, "I don't give a flying shit if you accept it or not. 'cause I'm telling you the truth." He said, "Well." So I've got to let all those Caribou blokes know, too, see. The result of that talk, they were the best fed bloody aircrew in Vietnam after this. So what happened, the, he sent me a telegram from Parliament House, he said, "Consider the matter discussed at length. It's in hand, son.

04:00 And the Australian transport flight, Vietnam, will be fed." So then we drove back, strange as it may seem, after, I just left it with Al Grassby and we obviously had a few beers and obviously enjoyed the moment and obviously got drunk I suppose. But then we came back to Wagga and

04:30 that's when Dasher, we heard Dasher had been killed. The circumstances were unknown at that time, but as it filtered through we got the message. And it was then, after Al went into parliament, he sent the telegram. So something in some way, certainly was accomplished by way of a comment. And so for that, I should talk to all those boys. That was good.

05:00 **And tell me about, the preparation for you actually leaving Vietnam?**

The preparation for me to leave Vietnam? I flew up till the time it was to come home, ready to come home. I packed all my bags and boxes, I think they gave me two days space, but I'd packed my gear, well before then and I

05:30 must admit, I had quite an arsenal, when I come home. And I had the works, but that's about it, you know, I sent them all home and there was no issue. No great preparation and we had our long drink, "Sayonara, beaucuop sing loi.

06:00 Uktalai." "Here I come." And jumped on a plane. And it wasn't like that in later years, apparently, it was a bit more ceremonial aspect to the departure and so no, I just, come home.

What were your feelings about leaving?

I could have stayed, but I wanted to come home. I could have stayed

06:30 quite easily. I was over, to me it was purely mechanical, obligations by way of emotion and whatever. There was no problem, I didn't want to run to the plane, I didn't want to scratch through the door, I could have quite easily stayed and there, if someone was in drama and needed to go home first because of family problems, I probably

07:00 would have said I would have stayed there quite honestly. So, I felt quite comfortable.

What was the experience like in the first few hours when you arrived back in Australia?

Marge'll answer that more than I will, 'cause I was pretty bitter. Bitter at the fact that the Australian people didn't recognise or acknowledge some of the stuff the Australians were doing in Vietnam. You know.

07:30 More so, some of our armchair air force, navy and army personnel that wouldn't know shit for sixpence. And how totally negative they were and how

08:00 quite, that's a strange comment, how ignorant they were to the fact that some of their own personnel were in harm's way. You know. And that, sort of, that to me, I never ever went to the mess in the end. They just gave me the shits. And I just, I went to one dining-in night and I walked out of there. I nearly vomited. All the bullshit that was going on. And so I never participated in the

08:30 bow tie and, what do you call those things, you wrap around your stomach and..? You know, white jackets, I never, cummerbund, I never participated in that sort of stuff. Only because I didn't want to. For me it was rather false. And not what it was all about. That was only in my opinion. Other people may say it was a great moment of

09:00 enjoyment.

What was it like seeing Marge and your kids?

Oh tremendous. They'd grown a hell of a lot and it was, there was no real problem with recognition really, was there. There was just, it was great and when we got to Tuross we, Lake Ulladulla and that, we had a great time. Was just like

09:30 that moment in time and it was a moment in time, but where we left off started again, you know, it was great.

And when you'd finished that time away and you had to settle back down into everyday life, were there certain things that would irritate you, about normal day-to-day living?

10:00 I have to admit the operational component was great, because it brought me back into an operational environment and so I had no problem with that. I have to go back to the snottiness of the mess structure, which I didn't participate in and - in their moments of entertainment and the rest of the guys in the mess were all good people, some of them went, I'm not that sure. But to me, the

10:30 operational side of it was great. But when they grounded me and put me in a depot, that hurt. That hurt a hell of a lot, because I don't believe I deserved that. 'Cause, I was very good at what I did, I was an A-grade, Cat [category] -A instructor, and to be repositioned to that particular portfolio I thought was an absolute bloody disgrace.

11:00 I couldn't be any blunter.

And you mentioned earlier about that you were different when you came back and sometimes were sort of hard to be around. When did these sorts of changes in you start to become evident?

I found

11:30 I had a problem, around about 1971. I, and finding, this is strange this, having said that, I took time out, I knew I had a problem. I took time out and I taped all my experiences. Taped them.

12:00 And then I rang, being a first grade rugby league player in Penrith, and I was captain of the club at the time, I was hiding a problem and the, so to me, to go to a psychiatrist, in Penrith, shit, half the town'd know the next day. So I ended up ringing a bloke in Burwood,

12:30 which is on the same train line, going past Parramatta or something. Anyhow, I said, "Look," I got onto his secretary and I said, "Look, I do have some tapes here, I'd like the gentleman to listen to. And they are rare, rare indeed. However, I'll pay him for the time it takes him to listen to them.

13:00 And then he may wish to talk to me, I'm not that sure." So I got on the train, I went down there. Had a schooner at the Burwood pub walked down. I can still, he was right opposite the park, I walked down at Burwood Park there, walked down to the psychiatrist's office, gave him my tapes and he looked at me and I said, "Please listen

13:30 to them." He said, "Okay." So I walked out and I went back in a couple of hours. And I paid him but I was up in the Burwood pub, I was sitting up there having a drink after drink, drink after drink. And so I, time was up, I went down there, he came out to me and he was white as that piece of paper and he said,

14:00 "I've never heard anything like this before in my life." And I said, "Well, I need help. I need some advice." That was the word I said. He said, "I can't even know what to say to you." And I said, "Well, who will?" And he said, "I really don't know." And I said, "Well you better make up your mind because there's a lot of people coming after me, I'll tell you, who've got the same problem. That need help." So

14:30 it sort of had come to a confrontation in the foyer there. You know and I said, "This is crazy, there's got to be someone in Australia who can address this." He said, "Well, you'd have to let me look into it." And I said, "Well, okay." And in the end, he says, "I can't think of anyone." I said, "Christ almighty." So I just left it at that and I walked out and I had to wait a while for the train and had a few more schooners.

15:00 Guess where the tapes ended up? Out the window. May God strike me dead. Crazy. Threw them out the window of the train. Half-pissed, full of bad manners, angry. Dirty. And I regret that to this day. You know, but anyway it happened. Shit happens.

What sort of things had you put on the tapes?

15:30 Everything. The whole lot. Warts and all. But that's life. Yeah.

16:00 **After seeing the man in Burwood, did you take any other steps to..?**

No, no not at all. So I sorted myself out in some way or other.

How?

I dunno. I kept on drinking for another five years. Until we moved to Brisbane. And we started a slow process

16:30 which wasn't easy. And then it all fell into place I suppose. But again, it wasn't easy, you know. But it

was quite sad because that would have been a tremendous document. You know, it was quite current, there was agile in the brain and quite precise in what I said, and quite accurate in what I said, and that was bloody sad that, and so anyway,

17:00 they're the mistakes you make in life. I should have retained it. It would have been great.

During this time were some of the problems that you were having sort of being reflected through your football playing?

Explain yourself. "Reflected?"

I guess did it change the way

17:30 **that you treated that decision that you'd made to play football rather than continue in the air force and..?**

Oh no, I vented myself on the football field and, which was rather, I considered healthy for me. It wasn't healthy for my body. But I, no, once I made that decision I never looked back and I've always maintained that, if you make a decision, don't look back.

18:00 I must admit that I have looked back a couple of times. On that decision so made but it was ten years we had to look at and I was given an opportunity to quite easily become an officer and I elected not to. And I probably would have made a good practical officer 'cause I'm practical person, there's no shades of grey

18:30 and probably Marge and I both agree that's the course of action that we should have taken in our lives, but we turned, I turned the other way. And that's life. But sorry.

During that period up until the end of the Vietnam War how closely did you follow what was happening in Vietnam?

Very closely, all me mates were

19:00 there. You know, I trained half of them. Some of them even got killed in Papua New Guinea before they went and I talked them into doing it. So there were some aftermath, sad moments also. 'Cause you know, during training in Papua New Guinea we lost a Caribou and all were gone on board and ran into a mountain in the rain. And that's part of tropical flying.

19:30 It was very sad.

What was your reaction to the public becoming more vocal on the situation in Vietnam?

I can understand, the public opinion, but

20:00 I can also understand the military opinion because until the public are put in an environment where they see some of the atrocities that took place, and some of the sadness there amongst the children, and that, you know, their, they shouldn't really comment so vocally, so severely when they don't know the actual problem that

20:30 they're commenting about. I just feel that again, human nature and the masses, the masses in a situation like that, overcome, outweigh common sense, just like any committee. The masses in committee overcome logic. And that's, whether it be Australia or USA...Marge and I have been to a Special Operations reunion in

21:00 the USA and we witnessed the same there. And but -

What was it like for you, hearing about the fall of Saigon?

Well, that was sad because I think the departure was sad also. And the, I can't comment to any great extent because I know some of the guys that were there and it

21:30 was, boy oh boy, they were left to their own resources also. And that, to me, is quite a questionable method of extracting yourself out of a country. Quite honestly.

Did any news about Vietnam, say news of the Australians leaving Vietnam, did any of those sorts of events increase

22:00 **any of the problems that you..?**

None whatsoever, no. None whatsoever.

Was there anything in particular that would trigger a bad day or a bad night for you?

I don't know, I think the, you heard me talk about something before where I tried to give that child assistance, I think probably a movie. I wouldn't sit in a movie with children crying, I'd have to walk out of the room. Same here, I'd walk

22:30 out of the room.

If there were children crying in..?

Anything, I'd walk out of the room. Couldn't stand it.

Did this affect your home life with your own children?

Oh, yeah, that's why very rarely I smack my children. And they were aware of that but there are times when it was necessary, but I'd never want to hear them

23:00 cry. So that happened. And Marge is my witness. And we, yeah, that's about it, children crying. Very sad.

When you came up to

23:30 **Brisbane and you said that you'd fixed yourself up, aside from not drinking what other..?**

I said, "I started to fix myself up." I don't think I really got into a recovery program until I eventually repositioned myself here, and got involved with other

24:00 veterans and looking at the problems in the veteran community of our era and as sort of...I also recognise that I had a very strong problem. And so I went and saw a guy and, Doctor Bullmire, he's a very magnificent man and, whose father flew bombers over Europe

24:30 also, same as Doug Harvey. So we had something in strong common and so me, I don't talk to anyone, I don't talk to anyone about anything like that, so we sat down for the first three or four outings we said nothing to each other and he had a cup of coffee and didn't even offer me a cup of coffee so I didn't mind that and had a glass of water. And he said, "You're a stubborn bastard aren't you?" "Probably I am."

25:00 And so we, we ended up breaking bread and talking things to this day. Apart from being what he is, he's an absolutely delightful guy, you know, so we embarked on a recovery program and which was great.

In terms of that sort of relationship and the kind of support that you offer through your

25:30 **Veterans support centre, what are the key things that help? In terms of, is it listening to someone, is it knowing the right thing to say..?**

What wasn't happening, was people giving, being given an easy path

26:00 to get their problems solved. Whether it be psychological, medically or whatever, and breaking the barrier of, to get into these people's minds was the barrier that required mutual respect. And the institution that we packaged was one that all of those guys were educated and

26:30 all of them were understanding of problems that veterans have, and all of them had a good rapport with a cross section of the medical community and so there were some people who could go to some psychologist and there was a chemical compatibility and there was some that....so they could channel it right and so, in a round about way, we got it right and there's idiosyncrasies there that

27:00 will never go away, but we seem to think what we've done is quite exceptional and we're all still learning. But I haven't answered your question. Mainly because I make a point of having absolute respect for privacy and so what happens between one advocate and a veteran or a widow, that's quite personal and we retain that integrity

27:30 and -

I suppose in terms of in your personal experience, what does it take for someone to be able to help your situation?

I get, to me, what I do, helps me in seeing what we've achieved, helps me. In seeing how we express ourselves in our national day of remembrance helps me.

28:00 The dialogue that I enter into allows me emotionally to address the issues. And that helps me, but along the way, it certainly imparts a very strong message into the community and so it's a bit of a win-win. And so in a round about way, I do things quite hiddenly to help me. And I

28:30 get away with that and I struggle here at four o'clock in the morning when I do my rehearsals for Anzac Day and I get up and the body clock is still attuned to Anzac Day right now. And so I make sure that the packages are quite intense, it is emotional, emotionally-draining quite frankly, but we put across a very unique message. And it's

29:00 very highly-regarded. So without the support centre and college of hospitality I've always said if ever I'm in the position to be able to help someone, I always will and we've done that rather nicely.

In terms of your experience of being exposed to a lot of Vietnam veterans and their problems, do you see recurring themes in terms of the way problems manifest?

- 29:30 It all depends. Quite frankly, the war, or their exposure to the threat of war, you know, warlike environment, affects people in many different ways. So that's the only answer I can give you, is the fact that different people react differently and different
- 30:00 people are affected differently. I put it this way, the, it's pretty hard for me to assess other people for the dimension I've been in and I wouldn't like anyone to go through that. But not many people have. So and there's a lot of other people who've been through worse situations than I have, I can assure you. They're
- 30:30 all good mates of mine. I still haven't answered your question.

What I'm actually asking is, just thinking back to what we talked about this morning in terms of the two friends of yours who committed suicide and they were both drug-related suicides, is there- have you seen, a commonality where there may be drug use as a result of..?

- 31:00 I think the whole medical profession went through a re-evaluation of their diagnosis attitude. Diagnostic attitude. And their medication attitude because to have access to these types of drugs on a very regular basis, was quite astounding and quite annoying at times. Because now,
- 31:30 there's still situations that are still occurring, that still should be really amended. And identifying a person with suicidal tendencies, yes, people are more aware of the lead-up situations, of suicidal people and it was just a dreadful phase that I don't really want to go through any more and
- 32:00 I don't think I ever will either. I don't want to. But there are other conflicts involved and I sincerely hope that the people coming after us are taken care of, in a more medicinal, methodical manner. Do you like that answer? I think that's very relevant. You know, because there's a lot of people come
- 32:30 home and just didn't, their circumstances weren't evaluated. Not that they had the experience to evaluate it anyway, quite honestly.

When you look back at the time you spent in Vietnam, what would you say the greatest change that occurred within you as a person was?

The greatest change in me, when I left? Oh I'd become quite cold.

- 33:00 Quite brutal. Quite hard really. I think there were times there where I should have been more understanding and sympathetic but I wasn't, you know, because you didn't have time so that legacy still stayed
- 33:30 with you for a long time and there's probably times now where I don't tolerate fools to any great extent in my life, you know. But from a family point of view, I need a smack on the hand for not being understanding. That happened. That did happen.

In what ways do you think your time in Vietnam made you grow up?

I was growing up at the age of seven, you know that. I was a

- 34:00 an old man in young boy's clothes. The way I was brought up and growing up. So to me, that growing up period of completed itself and I was self-sustaining, self-reliant, so come the fifteen when I joined the air force I was quite capable of mixing it with the best of them; I could survive. And, so going to Vietnam, I didn't have
- 34:30 to grow up. I think it took me to a dimension that I'd never been to before and I was happy the way I performed in that dimension. And I was very good at what I did, I was trained that way and, we were all trained that way and
- 35:00 so that was it.

In terms of the toll that it took on you in later life, and looking at the result of the situation in Vietnam, do you feel that your service was worth it?

Absolutely. I look at where I am now and along the way, you know, I've taken a couple of

- 35:30 psychological batterings but along the way I've also tried to acknowledge that, but along the way when you look at what I've done, I've absorbed that and I've kept it to myself, achieved quite a bit. A lot more than anyone else could possibly comment about. But I just feel that by re-applying what I do, and put the RSL
- 36:00 back into the RSL, there's to me, proof in my intent to create awareness, of what the RSL movement's all about. And that's looking after veterans, you know. Looking after the needs of veterans. Looking after widows now. And so that's what, to me, has allowed me to do. And I think a lot of people have listened to my crazy ideas
- 36:30 and allowed me to implement them. And so we have no hesitation, quite honestly, in how much it 'costs us as a cost centre to look after our veterans. In our community. We don't care. And to me, other RSLs would shudder at that statement, 'cause that costs money. But that's what an RSL's all about and they got to remember where the RSL image came

37:00 from. It came from World War I, World War II and what those gentlemen did, and women did in that time. And so here, RSLs are living off a very sad contribution to the world peace and to me, I can react to that. And so that's why I do, in the way I do. We put the RSL back in the RSL. Rather clearly, rather precisely, very accurately and very professionally.

37:30 And I'm proud of it. Full stop.

And looking back at your wartime service do you have any regrets?

None whatsoever. None whatsoever.

What personally, does Anzac Day mean to you?

Well Anzac Day, to me,

38:00 my intent on Anzac Day and what it means to me, is to create community awareness. And project the image of the veteran and project the quality of remembrance to the community and this is you know... You can go Anzac Day and say the ode and blow the trumpet and if you've got a bagpipe,

38:30 have a bagpipe and then it's all over, rover. And I've seen that happen. It happened at our place. Now, we start at quarter to four and we finish at half past, twenty past six and there's quite intense delivery in that period and so that really, as an RSL what we've done to the community has actually created

39:00 a tremendous amount of interest. And we have essays and competitions and whatever and the quality of the content of those essays, would startle you. So the research that they've done, in the community in the schools within our community is quite extraordinary. So we're achieving what we want to do and never forget and that's it, may you never forget. Lest we forget. So we're doing that and we're doing it rather nicely and

39:30 so our children can contribute also, with Anzac Day, participate, essays. We had two dawn service essays and midday essays but our cadets contribute, our lifesavers contribute, so it's a community.

40:00 **Have you got any final words that you'd like to sum up with?**

Well, I think the old commanding officer from Vietnam, he said when he was in hospital, he had stroke and whatever and I travelled down to the central coast, and a good old mate of mine, that I trained to go into Vietnam, we came to the retirement village home

40:30 and, high care and he said, "Ronny Workman's here, Doug, to see you." And he's looked up and he said straight in the eyes he said, "Memories that we'll never talk about but memories that we'll never forget." And then he disappeared. He just looked at me and disappeared. And I said, "Well I'll be darned." And so it's true.

INTERVIEW ENDS