

# Australians at War Film Archive

## George Goater (Rod) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1700>

### Tape 1

00:35 **So whereabouts did you grow up Rod?**

I was born and lived till I was 12 years old in Dumbleyung, Western Australia.

**That's a pretty small country town isn't it?**

Very small but it's sort of part of the wheat belt in Western Australia.

**What's the population like in Dumbleyung?**

I'd only be guessing now I dunno. Likely to be the Dumbleyung

01:00 and surrounding areas. It's quite a big shire. I would only be guessing 3-4,000 or something like that throughout the whole shire.

**That's pretty small by anybody's...**

Yeah.

**So what was it like growing up in such a small place?**

We thought it was pretty good in those days because we didn't know any different. Used to, once a year we got a trip to Perth if we were lucky, to the grandparent's place and that was really into the big smoke, and

01:30 now and again I think I can remember Albany. I think I would have been about 8 years old coming to Albany and camped on the beach at Emu Point. But that was only sand dunes then.

**So what sort of duties did you have as part of the farm?**

I helped Dad to go and get the sheep and around the house washin' up the... I had three brothers

02:00 and there was no girls around, we had to do all the local chores around the house and that. And I was the eldest so the others were only little takers at that stage in Dumbleyung because well I was only 12 years old when we left there, you see.

**And what was school like there in Dumbleyung?**

Pretty good. My Mum taught me, she was a school teacher and she taught me and three of my brothers at various stages through our early

02:30 schooling in Dumbleyung.

**Was she actually one of the teachers at the local school?**

Yes.

**Does that have its problems?**

It does actually and I used to get... several times I can recollect having getting a whack from Mum at school, and then when I went home she'd, if I'd have been really playing up, she'd inform Dad and I'd cop it again see.

**That's not fair.**

No.

03:00 **What sort of subjects did you do at school?**

The usual sums as we called 'em then. Spelling. History. Geography. I always enjoyed geography I don't know why. History I thought was, history like I don't think we should've ever been forced to do history

because it was gone. But, and I was probably dumbest at arithmetic.

**Did you play any sport?**

03:30 Yes, I played football cricket. Not a lot more in Dumbleyung it was well, even today it's probably worse today than what it was 50-odd years ago and more. It appears to me to have dried out further to what it was, which I think all our country is drying out. We had a big cricket ground. Plenty a room to run around that's for sure.

**What sort of things would you**

04:00 **do on the weekends?**

Amuse ourselves cause there was no TV [television] or anything but I can recollect sort of just making toys out of an old block of wood and a few parts off an old header, and make a bulldozer and push it around for hours out in the dirt. And or in the summertime go swimming in the dam, or sometimes I used to get on my pushbike and go over

04:30 to friend's place, he lived about 6 miles away and on a Sat'day afternoon we'd I'd go over there and we'd go down to the dam with an old 4 gallon kerosene tin and there'd be couple a bits a string and some meat, and sit there all day catching jorgies [yabbies]. Fill the 4 gallon tin up and when we'd finished we'd tip 'em all back in the dam and I'd peddle back home again. In those days don't ask me why, I can't remember, but none of our families used to eat jorgies and now people'd

05:00 go hundreds of miles to get a feed of them.

**Was that just your family or was it everybody?**

Well, it was the family of my friend they never ate 'em. As I say, we just tipped them back in the, tipped them in the dam and again then the next week or the week after we'd go and catch 'em all again. I think the old jorgies thought it was good fun. They got a bit of a feed and didn't seem to mind. But I can't even recollect people

05:30 in those days talking about eating jorgies.

**It was a different time as far as food was concerned I s'pose.**

Yeah. Well everything was pretty basic. We had a bit of mutton mainly mutton I s'pose. The odd WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK if Dad chopped the head off the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . And beef was around Dumbleyung, you were pretty lucky if you had a piece of beef really in those days anyhow.

**A diet of lamb?**

Yes. Well it wasn't even lamb. They

06:00 wouldn't kill their lambs you'd only get an old piece of mutton.

**Oh dear. What sort of food would your mum cook up for you?**

Again everything pretty basic. It was, Sunday was always roast, Sunday roast. But we were all right, as well probably only until recently I was always one for cooked breakfast like that. There'd be bacon and eggs if it was available. Sometimes, always plenty of eggs where we were but bacon at times was a bit

06:30 scarce for breakfast and things. But lunch, well goin' to school and that well we just had sandwiches and packed lunch. Night time, I can't even recollect really but just normal fare. But in most cases probably be some lamb chops or something like that for tea, and yeah the Sunday roast. But all very basic cooking.

07:00 No, I don't, well far as I know things like lasagne and things like that had never been heard of in those days.

**Sure. Did you have to grow your own vegies?**

Yes, we did grow our own vegies [vegetables]. Had quite a big vegie garden really. You could buy them in town but it was always nicer if you could have some of your own cooked stuff.

**Did you ever have to go to church on the weekends?**

Yeah, we had to go to church or Sunday school as kids, and I think

07:30 looking back now, our parents thought that they... I don't think they were particularly religious but they sort of grounded us I s'pose, in a religious upbringing as little tackers, and then probably after about the age of 14, I think, they didn't push it any further. Just the young ages we were encouraged to go to well, more than encouraged, we had to go to Sunday School

08:00 and then we even went to church fairly often I think.

**Was it a bit of a social sort of a thing church?**

It would a been Dumbleyung. Yes, go and say hello to the, have a bit of a talk to the neighbours and that because you could go for... well as far as Dad was concerned, I guess, like Mum was teaching most of the time in between having kids pretty close together because us boys were all not much more than, no more than 2 years apart anyhow.

08:30 But then in between havin' kids she was teaching in school and teaching us, in a lot a cases.

**Pretty busy lady?**

Yes, she was.

**Was your father in the Second World War at all?**

No, my Dad never saw active service or never saw war service at all, or no army or any sort of military service. He was, because of being a farmer, he was, I can't think what you call it now. He was...

**Manpowered?**

Yeah,

09:00 manpowered, they left 'em on the land.

**So at what point did you actually move somewhere else?**

In 1952 Dad sold the little farm we had in Dumbleyung and we moved to Popanyinning which is on the banks of the Hotham River, approximately a hundred and fifty 170 kilometres from Perth. Moved,

09:30 brought a bigger property there 2,300 acres from memory, and then I think it was only in the first 12 months they had the wettest year they'd had for many years up there and over half the property was under more than 2 feet a water. So that sort of dampened Dad's spirits I s'pose you could say. He ended up selling that fairly smartly and we moved then into Pingelly

10:00 cause Mum was, had been at all through the, well we were only on the farm at Popanyinning for probably 18 months, and for the time we were there Mum was still teaching school at Pingelly then. And anyway, then we sold the farm there and we moved into a little house in Pingelly but that was for a very short time. Well obviously Dad was never happy, not off the land, and

10:30 I in 1954 I can still remember him walking in the door and he just said to Mum, "C'mon get your gear packed up. I just bought a farm in Narrogin." So in 1954 we moved to Narrogin, and the farm in Narrogin is still owned by one of my brothers.

**So the one in Narrogin ended up being quite successful?**

Yes, yes. Not all that

11:00 big but yeah, over the years has been quite good to the family.

**So it was sheep and wheat?**

Yes, mixed farming.

**So what was Narrogin like in comparison to... ?**

Like moving from Dumbleyung to Sydney just about.

**Really?**

Narrogin was a big place. Yeah, Narrogin was a lot well more people. The countryside's a lot nicer to live in than over in Dumbleyung

11:30 and things like that. Well now'days, as I see it, probably if people from Dumbleyung hear me saying this won't like it but Dumbleyung seemed a bit like a desert type of thing. But it's a lot different sort of land and especially where we were, it was only 4 miles from Narrogin the farm that Dad bought in Narrogin, and it was quite pretty country really. In those days it was a lot nicer than what it is now even.

12:00 My sister-in-law says now it's just getting drier and drier.

**Gee. So what sorts of things did you do in Narrogin?**

Well, by the time we got to Narrogin I had left school. I went to school in Pingelly but I had a happy knack of upsettin' the teachers. I was asked to leave school more or less.

**You were expelled?**

Expelled.

**What did you do?**

Just we used to get up to pranks and I, at that age I wasn't interested in learning. I thought it was for

12:30 dummies I think, but of course I know a lot different now and very soon after that actually. But I left

school as soon as I was old enough. Well I'd gone at 14 and when we moved to Narrogin I got a job in town. Used to peddle my bike on a gravel road 4 miles out of town go to work every morning at a service station at that stage. Just

13:00 mainly a little grease monkey and car detailer it'd be called now, but I used to spend most of my day washing and polishing motor cars. For the 6 months or so.

**Is this where you started learning a bit about tinkering with cars and things?**

Well the, I guess the inclination was always there but I stuck at that for a while and then I, I dunno I think at about 15 I can't remember the exact time, but I

13:30 went and I worked in a local haberdashery come clothing store, a counter jumper for a while. I did all sorts of things.

**A counter jumper?**

Yeah, what we used to call a counter jumper. Worked behind a counter for measuring off. Well I was down in the crockery and kitchenware and all this sort a stuff in one a the bigger shops in town. I can't think, can't remember what they used to call it. Manning's I think it was in

14:00 Narrogin.

**Why did you decide to have such a radical change in job?**

I think just probably the learning curve. I just wanted to go and do different things and did that for a while, and then I went back working in another garage. So I always seemed to end up going back into the garage type of stuff.

**Did you still have to help your dad out with the farm?**

Yeah, little bit with sheep work and things like that. But that was another thing I didn't, I don't

14:30 like working with sheep. And it wasn't long before I, before I joined the army that Dad did actually ask me whether I wanted to stay on the farm or not. And I said, "No way, this farming is strictly not for me."

**Sheep?**

Yeah, well any sort of farming at that stage. But in retrospect now the only way I think I'd go farming is in cattle, but beef cattle not dairying.

15:00 But farming is, well my thoughts are probably you stand a better chance or you'd be better off backing a horse than trying to go farming, it's such a big gamble I feel.

**Yeah.**

But lot a people make a lot a money out of it. But they're got it pretty hard.

**I'll say. So after the haberdashery you went back to a service station?**

It was a garage actually, like

15:30 they sold new cars and actually did the repairs and things like that.

**So is that where you started picking up a few skills?**

Yeah, little bit. But I left that one too and then went and worked for another old chap who fixed farm machinery and I enjoyed working on the farm machinery. Little tractors and things like that.

**How did you learn how to tinker with things like that?**

I think I must've had a natural ability I guess, but just

16:00 through what people taught me, but all this time I was trying to get an apprenticeship and do something but no one wanted to take on apprentices I don't think, or didn't appear to. But also while all this was going on from the age of 13 I had I always wanted to be in the navy. And at 13 years old I actually, well with Mum c you've got to have parental consent, but I applied to join the

16:30 navy as a cadet midshipman first of all at 13 years old, and then at 15 I tried again for cadet midshipman and at 15 again cadet midshipman. They kept knockin' me back because as a kid I had osteomyelitis.

**What's that?**

It's a disease of the bone. I had it all down my leg. I've got scars and things all up and down my leg and also got it in my chest. It's a disease of the bone they have to

17:00 virtually cut away part of the bone you see, it gets into the centre into the marrow of the bone and it. But anyway, the navy wouldn't have me because I'd had this medical condition as a little tacker.

**Well that would a been hard to get treatment out in the country?**

Well it was. I was only two and a half years old. It's a thing that you can pick up out of the ground apparently, and a kiddy that was on one of the,

17:30 a farm that Dad was share cropping before we moved and before he actually bought one in Dumbleyung, one a the kiddies on the farm before us had had the same problem. And I got that at about two and a half years old. Needless to day I can't remember any of it but it was something the navy.... Well I kept trying to join the navy up until I was 17 even to the stage of trying to join the navy as just a lowly

18:00 old seaman. And anyway, they didn't want me. I was knocked back on medical grounds all the way.

**What was the attraction to the navy?**

I don't know. But as there's a little photo over there that you'll see of a little bloke in sailors uniform. My grandmother, Mum's mother made that up for me after I'd had the osteomyelitis in my leg, and just so that there was a little sailors uniform it had long pants and it covered up all the bandages

18:30 or whatever I had on my leg over those years. And I dunno whether some of that rubbed off because none of our family has that I know of, had ever been in the navy or anything to do with the sea. So I don't know.

**But apart from that you would not have seen the sea very much either?**

No, no. And also even today like, we've got our own little boat and we go fishing but I don't go anywhere where there's too... I get so seasick it's not funny.

19:00 So it's probably just as well I didn't join the navy.

**The navy was just not going to happen for you.**

No.

**So is that a bit young though to be able to join the navy in those days, 13?**

No, I don't think. Whether they still do it but a cadet midshipman, it's sort of like an apprentice school, you don't actually got to sea I don't think. You learn sea skills but it's, you start at 13 and you're actually training to be an

19:30 officer

**Gee.**

from that young age. Whether that still happens I don't know.

**Neither do I.**

But I presume that maybe it does. There is somewhere like it'd be like an advanced school I guess. Instead of going to an ordinary school they'd, you join the sort of the navy and you go to a navy school.

**So back to where you're tinkering with the harvesters.**

All sorts of things, yeah.

20:00 **Who were you actually working for at that time?**

With on the tractors and things? A man called Mr Ted Sharpe in Narrogin. I always reckoned old Sharpie taught me a lot really. He used to let me loose pretty well and just obviously kept a bit of an eye on me because people were paying for work going out of there, but I used to do quite a lot there and I enjoyed doing it.

**So was he actually a qualified**

20:30 **mechanic?**

Yes.

**So it was sort of an apprenticeship without having an apprenticeship?**

That's right, yeah.

**So what would the hours be like doing that sort of work?**

It was pretty straight forward at that stage as a kid. I was more or less 8 till 5, I would say, I just can't remember now. But I think old Ted probably put, obviously put in a lot more hours than that. Especially in times like seeding time and that because

21:00 in later years, like after I got out of the army I ended up sub contracting and gee you were lucky to get 4 hours of sleep a night during harvest time and things like that sometimes, depending on what was happening.

**So machinery just keeps breaking down?**

Yeah, we, I ended up sub contracting with a fellow that he had a service vehicle and he just, people would be ringing up something goes wrong they expect you to come and fix it there

21:30 and then. Doesn't matter what time of day it is.

**Don't s'pose you get paid overtime?**

Oh yes, extra hours and things you get paid for it.

**That's good.**

You do now anyhow.

**So are you about 16 at that time that you're doing that work?**

Yes 16 years old and, c I joined the army when I was 17, and very early 17, so.

**Where has this idea come from to join the army?**

I dunno but like the navy, I just think somewhere along there I just had a service career in mind.

22:00 And it happened because actually before joining just the ordinary regular army I had again tried to get into the Army Apprentice School at Balcombe, and that was back when I was about 15, the first time, because you started your apprenticeship in the army at 15. But I tried there, and anyway they, then I was getting knocked back for anything like that because I never had the education qualifications

22:30 and it was starting to hurt even then, leaving school so early and getting kicked out of school. But that's water under the bridge then.

**So how did you go about signing up for the army?**

In the end I asked Mum and Dad and said could I join the army and I think they, well Mum especially probably said it a bit tongue in cheek and she said yes,

23:00 they would sign the consent forms. So I signed up and I was inducted into the regular army at the tender age of about 17 years and 1 week I think.

**Didn't your parents think that you'd pull it off so to speak?**

Well, there may have been a bit a that thought. They might a thought, oh well this'll be just over in a flash sort a thing. Well originally I signed Royal Australian something

23:30 Reserve [Royal Australian Army Reserve]. It was you were still in the regular army but it was only for a 3 year term. But anyway, that all carried on. But I was quite fortunate I took pot luck by joining the regular army and then in my, I can't think of the word now, in my preferences I said that I would prefer to go into RAEME

24:00 and try and be a mechanic. RAEME being Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. I did my recruit training at Kapooka in New South Wales and then we had to put our preferences in order so I put RAEME, RAEME, RAEME and RAEME I think, and anyway two of us, only two of us from our intake from Kapooka were accepted into RAEME. Neither of us had any qualifications what so ever. But then

24:30 from recruit training I was posted to Puckapunyal.

**So you've signed the papers what happens next? Are you informed by the mail that you have to go somewhere in particular?**

No, from recruit training I was posted to 101 Infantry Workshops at Puckapunyal in Victoria.

**So where's the basic training, where does that happen?**

25:00 This is basic army training?

**Yeah, the first thing that you do.**

That's at Kapooka.

**Kapooka.**

Kapooka. That's where they teach you to left, right, left, right, and yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir. And make a soldier out of you in 3 months.

**Where is Kapooka?**

Kapooka's about 80 miles north of the Victorian border in New South Wales

25:30 just alongside Wagga Wagga.

**Right. So how did you get over there?**

We, they kept us in Perth at Western Command Personnel Depot for 3 or 4 weeks I think it was, until they get enough people to make up a part of a trainload I think it was. But then we went on the trans-continental across the Nullarbor, which was an adventure in itself really, I thought in those days anyhow.

26:00 It was great, I loved the train trips.

**With the depot that you were staying at for 3 or 4 weeks were you issued with a uniform at that point?**

Yes, they issued you uniform. You walk in and they throw a pair of boots and some uniforms at you and nothing sort of fitted all that well but you were issued with a basic kit and it was all pretty good. We got issued with ours and put our uniforms on and went out on the town next night because they

26:30 were, we were just being held until.... And course 17 years old with a uniform on we thought we were pretty good.

**So you weren't really doing any training at all at the depot?**

No, no training at all. At the depot you just had to do some of the local, well you got picked up for mess duties like washing dishes and things like that. Whatever was going on. Cleaning up the area, pickin' weeds in the garden whatever. And they usually held over for up to a

27:00 month in any a those places while they got a big enough crew together, send them over.

**So this train journey how long did it take to get over there?**

Three going on 4 days I think, because in those days the train, you had to get on a train in Perth and you went to Kalgoorlie and then you changed trains and you went across on the trans-continental as it was called then. Went from there to Port Pirie in South Australia

27:30 and then you changed trains at Port Pirie and you went to Adelaide and then from Adelaide we went to Melbourne. And then they held us in Melbourne in another holding unit until they had enough again to send us up to Kapooka and then they shoved us on the train from Melbourne to Albury, and then you had to change trains at Albury and get on the train that went from Albury through to Sydney.

28:00 But we only had to go from Albury to Wagga Wagga where they... We hopped off the train and they bundled us into some trucks and they took us into Kapooka, which I don't know why, but sometimes the army seems to pick some of the most desolate sort of seeming places in the country. But at that time of the year, it was May then and May around Kapooka can be very

28:30 cold. I know the old, we were only in Nissan, what they called the Nissan huts. Most of the camp at Kapooka in those days, that's all it was and they were carry overs from Second World War which or possibly even before that I think. But then a course it wasn't that long after the Second World War in those days, because it was only 1957 then.

**Did you make any friends on the train?**

29:00 Yeah, it's pretty, the train is pretty good and plus there was quite a few of us sort of army personnel just joined up, we probably occupied one carriage or something or whatever it was. But we were supposed to stay where we were but we used to mooch around and get up into the civvy [civilian] section of the train and get to know people, girls and all sorts and it was quite good.

**It was a real adventure then.**

Yes, the train trip's wonderful.

**How did they feed you when you were on this**

29:30 **train journey?**

You've just asked me a question. I can't remember the first trip.

**That's all right.**

I'm not sure but I don't recollect going to the civilian, I think the army might've had some of their own cooks on a section of it and we just had some army tucker then. I'm not sure about that one.

**Did you have any leave in Melbourne when you stayed over there?**

Yes, we used to get, we

30:00 were allowed to go into the city at night and so forth and you know, round camp durin' the day you had to do chores and unless, if you weren't rostered for doing some particular thing at night like keeping the boilers stoked up so there was some hot water or something like that. Boiler picket or something they used to call it, well you were free to go into town and look around and...

**What did you think of Melbourne?**

Well, again it was a big adventure c Melbourne was a lot bigger than Perth and the further we were going the cities were

30:30 getting bigger, and yes it was all one big adventure. It was great.

**Have you hooked up with other West Australians?**

As far as the...

**Just mates to go and... ?**

Yeah, once we got to Melbourne you tended to meet, in there might've been people from South Australia or anywhere, I can't recollect anyone in particular. But I think usually at night you'd, most times you'd pal up with a couple of blokes

31:00 at least just to go.... I guess really we were scared to go out on our own because it was all the big, well it was probably quite safe in those days but of course we were way out of our depth. We thought we were pretty good. We were soldiers, we were indestructible then but that's the way it is.

**The scary big city?**

Yes, it was I think, yes.

**So Kapooka. Can you describe Kapooka for me?**

In this

31:30 am I allowed to swear?

**Yep you can.**

The arsehole of the world at that stage we thought. But in retrospect I enjoyed it. I went in there weighing around about 10 stone I came out as fit as a fiddle and about 13 and a half stone which was a, and we never, with recruit training you don't stop. You just go, go, go all the time and I thrived on it. The biggest

32:00 problem was I could never get enough to eat. Some blokes went crook they reckoned the army tucker was no good. But I dunno, it mightn't a been much good but I couldn't get enough of it so I reckon it was pretty good and I thrived on it. I liked it, enjoyed it.

**What would an average day be like?**

Get out a, well keeping in mind that its wintertime. Freezing blinkin' cold. Frosts and things up there. Out of bed at 5 o'clock I think it was. 5 o'clock

32:30 in the morning. You had to jump out of bed just chuck on any old pair of shorts or something and form up out on the parade ground and answer roll call. And you'd be standing there shivering and carrying on and the old sergeant'd be yelling and bellowing at you, and then it was back into the barracks and you had to have your ablutions like wash and shave, shower whatever. And most times the water was either red

33:00 hot or freezing cold because the blokes on duty the night before had let the boiler go out, or something like that. But you had to have a shower anyhow, and sometimes it was so cold. But have a shower every... and I think breakfast was about 6:30. But you had your shower, your shave, and you had to make up your bed rolls. You didn't physically pull the bed to bits and just remake it up. Like

33:30 you had to pull everything apart and fold the blankets up into little squares and everything had to be squared off and ready for inspection. You had to sweep the huts out and dust, and this is the, in the recruit training at Kapooka, this is where the sergeant major comes around with his little white gloves and checks the top of the cupboard and things and make sure everything's clean. But that's part of basic training. I don't think it hurt any of us. Probably do a lot a people

34:00 a damn lot a good today.

**So how was the discipline there?**

Discipline was pretty tough. I believe now that if you were treated like we were treated in some ways now, there'd be people up in arms everywhere. And I think well things have changed a heck of a lot to what they were. I actually saw a bloke clouted with the butt of a rifle because he wasn't doin' things

34:30 properly by one a the instructors. But that was just par for the course in those days. If that was to happen today I'm sure the you'd everyone'd read and hear about it on television, and things like that. But I don't think any, far as I know, everyone survived and it was part of the training.

**Did you have any sorts of rifle training at the time?**

Yes, yeah. You're issued with a rifle after, at Kapooka



- 35:00 I think after the first 4 weeks of basic training then you're issued with a rifle which became... you've got to know your rifle inside out and you had to remember the number of it, and then after about 4 weeks you start your actual rifle training which at that stage is just drill, learning how to slope arms, port arms, and all this sort of a thing. That probably goes on for about another month and then finally
- 35:30 they'll... And also at the same time you'll be learning how to load and unload the rifle and put bullets in the magazines and eventually the day comes that you're looking forward to, is going out on the rifle range and firing this terrible big thing that weighs, especially when you're training with it, seems to weigh so much, so heavy which a .303 was the rifle that we used in those days, and it was pretty heavy I think, compared to
- 36:00 the new arms they're using today.

**What was it like to shoot?**

Probably a bit scary, I suppose. I had, before that, actually fired a .22 a few times but I was never, and still am not all that keen on firearms. They don't do a lot for me. I think the first time I went on the rifle range and they gave us a couple of

- 36:30 bullets or whatever it was, in the magazine and told us to load the magazine and then lie down on the mound and shoot. Well, I don't think I really knew what was gonna happen. And the old .303 if, well you'd been instructed how to hold it and what you must do and that but if you didn't hold it real tight it'd hurt your shoulder in the recoil. I guess the first time I was a little bit more than apprehensive, I suppose would be the word.

- 37:00 **How did you shape up as far as target practice was concerned?**

I qualified. I wasn't a good shot I guess. I could hit the target but yeah, I wasn't a real good shot. But qualified was the main thing. All you had to do, well it probably still goes today, as long as you qualified.

**Sure. So after these 3 months you went to Puckapunyal is that**

- 37:30 **correct?**

Yes. Went to a Royal Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineer workshop at Puckapunyal where the prime objective of that workshop at that time, in Puckapunyal was repairing tanks. The tanks in those days was the British Centurion, a whopping big heavy thing. But I know 1

- 38:00 Workshops used to do the major repairs on the tanks for the Armoured Corps who were at that stage posted in Puckapunyal.

**So how do they train you up in order to deal with these tanks?**

Well, in those days I wasn't a qualified mechanic or anything. They posted me there and I was a general dogsbody, a lackey. Like if one of the qualified blokes wanted something done way down underneath, go and fetch that spanner from underneath, that was my

- 38:30 prime part of my job I guess. I eventually, they let me drive a truck and we used to go, they still used to do quite a lot of exercises training out on the firing range and things like that. And here I was at 17 years old and finally they said you can drive that truck which was an old, it was what called the workshop truck. It

- 39:00 had workshop gear all in the back of it. It was an old 1942 Ford Blitz truck and I thought I was Christmas driving that. But I never got posted to Puckapunyal. I think I got there in about the August of 1957. Again it was quite an adventure. It was different. Everything was an adventure

- 39:30 and it was a learning curve as well because I, well at that stage I think my biggest concern was getting to drive everything that I could get in. Like if someone said you wanna have a drive of this? Well you'd go and you'd drive it. That was the main thing probably, in the early days there because there was so many different things to drive and ride, and it

- 40:00 was just it was all good fun I suppose. I guess everything was still fun. As 17 years old like we thought we were men but 17 years old, lots of Mums are still running round calling their 17 year old kids their little babies, aren't they. So...

**Were the other blokes there around about the same age as yourself?**

No, I was probably the youngest chap in the unit at that stage. Being a trade unit

- 40:30 most of the chaps were older. They were either ex-army apprentices, and to be an apprentice... When you did your apprenticeship then you went in at 15, well I think the apprentices in those days, had to do 5 years anyhow. And that was 5 years of trade training plus further. Well if you'd went to apprentice school you had to do your army training as a soldier as well, at the same time. But generally speaking yes, would probably

- 41:00 at that stage be the youngest man in the unit or youngest boy in the unit, depending on the way you liked to look at it.

### **Was there any formal sorts of lessons?**

No, not at, they weren't a training unit. Not as far as trade training went. That came a little later because I think in about the early December of 1957 the company sergeant major came

- 41:30 up to me and said, "Private," as I was called then, "Private Goater, in January next year you won't be coming back here, you'll be going to Bandiana, the RAEME training centre," which is a trade training school. So I finished up the year and they sent me back home here to Western Australia, on leave towards the middle of December 19...

## **Tape 2**

### **00:30 So how'd you spend that time on leave Rod?**

Running around Narrogin and letting every nun know that I was a grown up, fully fledged soldier I think. Because I'd done my basic training and I'd been in the army for a while, 7 or 8 months or something like that. But yeah, get together with old acquaintances and friends and don't even

- 01:00 know that, in those days I think we went to the pub a couple of times because, mainly I was allowed to go to the pub because I was a soldier and in uniform and they couldn't stop you, but the drinking age was still 21 then. But we were allowed to go in the pub.

### **That's a great perk.**

Yeah. The only thing is I wasn't a drinker. I never drank and smoked until quite some years later on, probably. But

- 01:30 being 17 and having to prove a point I guess, well we went into the pub a couple a times. I probably had about one and a half beers and I would a been flat on me ear.

### **So had you been homesick at all while you were away?**

No. No, I don't think so.

### **What about your family, had they missed you?**

Probably didn't have time. Mum was always, well if she wasn't lookin' after kids she was teaching kids and things like that, and on the farm

- 02:00 dad was kept pretty busy all the time. And I guess as parents they wouldn't have, they weren't the sort a people would've said anything anyhow. But I guess as parents they would've missed me a bit and I guess I missed them. But it would've been too manly to admit it I guess. But I can't recollect being sort of homesick or anything like that. Everything was still too big of an adventure. It was,

- 02:30 we were out in the, or I was out in the big wide world and having fun as such, I s'pose. If you can talk about recruit training and sort of being told where to go and what to do and how high to jump, by a series of, at some stages, seemed to be pretty obnoxious Sergeants and things like that. But in later years I was to become one myself.

### **So you'd successfully cut the apron strings?**

I think so, yes.

### **Did your family notice any changes about**

### **03:00 you?**

I don't think so. I can't recollect anyone ever saying anything no, and I don't think at that stage I'd changed that much except I know when I first come home Mum couldn't get over how much fitter and that I guess I was. Well I would a been a lot fitter, and as I say I put on about 3 stone in 3 months or whatever it was, and you couldn't

- 03:30 really see it a heck of a lot. It was just muscle I s'pose and things like that.

### **So you'd grown up a bit, hey?**

Well yes, I liked to have thought so.

### **So where were you posted then Bandiana?**

I was posted from Puckapunyal, the workshops in Puckapunyal and I was posted to the RAEME training centre which is an adult training

- 04:00 establishment for mechanics, electricians, fitters and turners. They did a compressed, that's not the word. They trained us to be a mechanic in 12 months. But in that 12 months you had to, I had to re sign on in the army before I finished that particular course, 12 month course, to say that I would...

- 04:30 Well you had to do 6 years or more service after you'd done that 12 month course to fully qualify as a mechanic if you went out into civilian life. I enjoyed every minute of it. Again, I only just qualified in those early days. I just qualified in all subjects, doing exams during the year, and at the final exams.
- 05:00 Everything was too exciting. There was too much going on so we just... I think most of the chaps on the same course as myself, which there was another 7 or 8 I think mechanics, and there was 7 or 8 fitters and turners. And we all just qualified just enough to get past because the Albury-Wodonga is even, though now it's not very
- 05:30 far from Wagga, Kapooka, really only about 80 or 90 miles. But I've still got a soft spot for the area. Bandiana is on the Victorian border. Albury-Wodonga is located right on the New South Wales Victorian border. There is so much going on there is,
- 06:00 they've got the Hume Weir. There was water sports we used to be into all sorts of water sports. We got to know people with boats. It was only 60 miles, I know I should be speaking in kilometres, but only 60 miles to go to the snow in the winter. We used to wake up in the morning in the wintertime and we could see the snow on the mountains. But most days even in the wintertime, crystal clear, frosty, real cold
- 06:30 winter mornings and things, but it's just a wonderful part of the world I think over there. It's also on the Murray River and the place, Albury actually absolutely crawled with girls, women and we were all a bunch of virile kids you know. It was just a great place to be and a great 12 months of my life
- 07:00 spent there learning to be a qualified mechanic.

**So whereabouts were you chasing skirt?**

Well, in town into Albury. I was, I think it would have been about the, must have been about the end of February of 1958, I was able to see my way clear to buy my first motor car and I had my eye on this 'you beaut' machine in one of the local car yards in Albury.

- 07:30 It was a 1939 Ford V8 convertible and it cost me a hundred pounds and I had to pay it off, because I think in those days we were getting, I did have my old pay books but I've mislaid them over the years, but we were getting, I think I was on 1 pound 2-and-6 or something, a day. Which adds up to about 7 pounds a week. And
- 08:00 anyway I bought this old car and then at night when we probably should've been sitting home doing a little bit of study we were usually in town, not so much even in those days I wasn't a drinker, but we used to go into the pubs because it was the in thing to go into the pubs I guess. And chasing a
- 08:30 bit a skirt. We used to go to every dance that was on around the place. They had a dance every Saturday night at the Palais in Albury and it was a, it's quite a big hall, auditorium you'd call it I guess, but it used to be packed every Saturday night.

**So you must have been rocking and rolling at these dances that you just described?**

Yeah, I reckon, well

- 09:00 I was a pretty good dancer I think in those days, and I always have liked dancing. I still like it but my hips don't lately. I dunno whether my hips are, too much swivelling hips or something in the earlier days maybe, I don't know.

**Too much twisting.**

Yeah.

**What kind of dances did you do in those days?**

Well Bill Haley and the Comets and all them were around, we were just rock and roll mainly. But I enjoyed ballroom type dancing as well.

- 09:30 The actual dances at the Palais or most of the dances in those days I suppose, were sort of 50/50 all mixed up with the modern rock and roll stuff in those days, and ballroom and the older type dances. But I used to be able to handle the whole lot of them pretty well I think.

**Carve up the dance floor.**

Yes.

**And were they alcohol free?**

The dances were but

- 10:00 it was right alongside a, that particular one in Albury was right alongside the New Albury Hotel as it was called. We used to sneak in and out of the bar there a fair bit. And in those days I wasn't drinking beer but, so to be with the mob I used to drink some of these funny apricot cocktails and things, and used to make myself pretty sick I think at times, just tryin' to keep up with the mob. But, which wasn't

very smart but that's the way

10:30 it was.

**So there wouldn't a been too many of these convertible Fords on the road ?**

No, I wished I had it today. In the 12 months that we were in Bandiana I did 50,000 miles in that old car. Used to keep me poor putting petrol in it, although most times couple a the other chaps'd put in, and like if we were going somewhere on a long trip, but most of it was just

11:00 tripping around town. But the poor old... it was a junk heap really for a motor car, it was. In this day and age you wouldn't be allowed to drive it on the road. Probably dangerous and everything else. But it was a motor car and there was lots of those sort of cars on the road in those days. But the rules, the laws weren't as strict or anything like that, you were able to drive them around.

**So you didn't do any work on the motor?**

No, not really. I couldn't

11:30 afford to put petrol in it and fix it. So it, one thing had to overcome the other and we, once you've got wheels, you had to have wheels and... No just patched it up to keep it going. But I recollect going to, c we used to go sometimes, jump in the car and go to Melbourne for the pictures, and it's 200 miles 400 mile round trip you know. We were going down one night and the tie-rod,

12:00 one a the tie-rod ends dropped off. That's in the steering. And anyway being the old car they were, it never ran off the road. I got out and bashed it back on and wired it up and it was still like that for quite a while.

**Were you into street racing at all?**

No, no, no. Again, we could hardly afford to buy the petrol just to put in and to run around town. But no, we weren't into, you didn't go out and...

12:30 If you got out on the open road sometimes you'd be a bit silly and put your foot down and see how fast it'd go. But again, in retrospect, I used to get the old girl goin' pretty quick at times, and gee I wouldn't be game now. Like just, I wouldn't get in knowing what I know now and that, I wouldn't get in the car and drive it at that speed. It just wasn't roadworthy.

**What was the daily routine during the course?**

13:00 Pretty laid back really. It wasn't a heck of a lot of regimental type of stuff. There was a little bit. They had a, first thing in the morning, well you're out a bed at about, I dunno, 6 in time... Say you'd get up and have breakfast. If you didn't want breakfast or if you'd been out the night before well you might have a few more minutes in bed, but you had to be on parade at 8 o'clock in the morning

13:30 where they had a roll call, and the regimental sergeant major would get up and do a bit a yelling and tell you where you, generally your rooms weren't being left good enough, or whatever it might be. And then you'd march off the parade ground and they, you would have to march down to the various workshops and then you'd just go into the

14:00 trade training side of it, whether it be... There was quite a lot of classroom stuff especially early days. But then it went into physical hands-on learning how to do things and you were marked, actually marked on the jobs you did. It might be cylinder head reconditioning, or the early part of the course was actually teaching you fitting and turning. How to use a file. You had to

14:30 use, teach you how to, the proper use of hand tools and all this sort a stuff. But yeah, that 12 months was as well 8 to 5 during the day then the nights and things were pretty well much your own. Every now and, it wouldn't be very often, but you might get a picket duty, which a picket might a been... In the early days

15:00 when we went there they still had the old type huts and that and they still had the old boilers and things. You had to keep the boilers hot, but then half way through that year that we were there they built new barracks and we were the first ones to move in to the new barrack block. And of course the new barrack blocks had all you beaut, new fangled electrical water services or something. I dunno yeah, must a been electric I think. And there was virtually no regimental

15:30 type duties to speak of. Just now and again. Or if you were a real naughty boy you might end up having to do something and they might keep you in sort of like after school, but you might be asked to do some sort of a picket duty or even to go and work in the sergeants' mess or something and wash dishes or something.

**What kind of things could you get into trouble there for Rod?**

Not

16:00 having a proper shave or being disrespectful maybe, to not saluting an officer, or these little regimental 'ditties datties' still came into... You still had to be a soldier first even though you were learning a trade.

It was a soldier first and trade second really, and you had to abide by the rules.

**Can you describe the old barracks that you were in initially?**

16:30 **They sound like they were pretty rugged?**

They were bloody rugged. They had wooden floors but they were old. They were just made out of galvanised iron. There was no lining in 'em and the dust used to seep up through the floors in say, like for the summer part, and in the winter you'd be so cold. But thankfully, I'm just trying to recollect, I think the new barrack block

17:00 was finished in about the June or July of 1958. So we were in the old buildings for around about 6 months of our time there. But the new barrack block, of course, was double brick and 2 storey and wonderful place. But the old block, again we survived. When look back at it now people wouldn't live in 'em now today, some a the things they had. But that was life

17:30 and I s'pose we didn't know any different anyhow, really. So, c we'd only come, and even when I was posted at Puckapunyal, well they were still all living in those days in old Nissan, c a Nissan hut is like half a tank, it's just made of corrugated iron and a couple a windows in it and a door at one end or something like that. The barracks at Bandiana in those early days, weren't much different.

18:00 They were pretty basic.

**Just coming back to the course, how did you find the classroom work or the study or theory?**

It was good, interesting. I enjoyed it. And I found I was, in later years, even though by that stage I was only 18 years old, anyhow but I found that to me, I dunno whether it's the same for everyone, but it's a lot easier to learn as you get a bit older. When

18:30 you're a little kid at school sometimes it's pretty hard. You don't want to I don't think, when you're a small kid, but the older you get then the, to me the willingness to learn becomes more or something like that. And I found it was easier to absorb. But again, during that basic, that 12 months basic course which it was called the First 1958

19:00 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] basic course, and that's what it was, to teach you the basic things about being a motor mechanic. And I absorbed it all right. I never, I can't ever remember sitting down and studying before an exam, and usually we were out tomcattin' [on the town] half the night. So

19:30 you just went in and then when you had an exam, as long as you got your pass which I think it had to be 60% or better or something, and that, just all they wrote then was qualified. I don't think anyone got an A or a B pass on any of our courses. But just qualified and that was it.

**What happened when the course was completed?**

Well, while the course was on I met and ended up

20:00 marrying my first wife. I was a whole 18 years old. I got her in the family way, and so in those days you had to do the right thing. So I was actually married in the, I dunno what it was, the October I think, and anyway...

**So you did a lot a living in that time didn't you?**

I certainly did. And the course finished in the December of 1958 and the posting orders came out and I was posted to

20:30 Melbourne area workshops, which is virtually right in the centre of Melbourne. But once you're married in the army well your wife became your next of kin and you only got leave to there anyway. I bundled my new wife on an aeroplane and sent her back to Western Australia to meet the parents and that, and then at the end of the course they had to send

21:00 you on leave to where your next of kin was and she was still in Western Australia. So I got sent back to Western Australia for the Christmas leave of 1958, and we then came back to Melbourne in January 1959.

**And did you say you had a child?**

No, not at that stage.

**OK.**

My first born was

21:30 29th of May 1959. So yes, I became a father just after I turned 19, and yes we were, I was then at Melbourne in Miles Street, South Melbourne.

**So what happens now that you're a married man and a father and in the army, how does that change your...?**

Well,

- 22:00 it didn't probably change a lot because the army to me I think, was still a big adventure. And well, Bruce came along in May '59. At that stage like, the pay still wasn't all that real good. You get a, we used to, I can't remember now, you get a bit extra when you're married, a marriage allowance and things like that. But in Melbourne we were living in little one bedroom flat first off
- 22:30 and I travelled to and from work. We were living not that far from my actual work. In the meantime my old '39 Ford, when we moved to Melbourne I up-traded it and got a 1953 Ford Zephyr then and we were in business. We had good wheels and.

**Is that a sedan or...?**

That was just a sedan,

- 23:00 yes.

**So now that you're married you live off the camp is that right?**

Yes. We, in those days they never had any married quarters, well I don't think they did. Well they would have had a few on camp, but the place that I was actually posted to in Miles Street, South Melbourne was just a workshop in the suburbs. There was no living quarters, there was nothing. We had to supply

- 23:30 our own meals. They didn't have meals or anything there and if there was people... Yeah, the army did have some homes but in the suburbs for married personnel but they were few and far between, and I was along way off getting one. In actual fact, we were in Melbourne from 1959 to 1962 when I was shifted to Sydney. So in the,

- 24:00 I think it must have been, I think it must have been only the late part of 1961, or the very early part of 1962, I was allocated married quarters.

**Was that just to do with seniority, how long you'd been in the army?**

It's a bit like state housing and that, you have to go on a waiting list and yeah, it is to do with seniority, how long you'd been waiting and all this sort of a thing. But finally got married quarters there, but then wasn't

- 24:30 in 'em very long. Well they were only flats anyhow, in which is a pretty bad sort of Melbourne now days. Probably wasn't all that flash then but they were brand new and we didn't mind, they were nice, brand new flats and they were cheaper than renting out.

**Did the flat or unit that you'd rented out earlier did you get that subsidised at all or did you have to pay for it entirely yourself?**

No, no. Paid for it. That cost 5 pound, 10 shillings a week, that one.

**And what were you earning?**

- 25:00 Well, it would have been wouldn't have been anything much more than about 14, 15 pound a week. Round about.

**So it's a fair...**

Probably about a third of that would be in rent, of your pay, would be in rent which sounds a bit hard but that's the way it was. And then you had to put petrol in your car. But you could go and get 5 or 10 shillings worth of petrol and that'd keep you going for a fair while.

**That's some consolation.**

Yes.

- 25:30 **What was the purpose of the workshop that you were in?**

The Melbourne area workshop serviced all the Melbourne area vehicles what they call B-vehicles which is ordinary wheeled motor cars, light trucks and things that had, were mixed up in the actual of running Victoria Barracks. And any of the staff cars that the generals and whatever rode around with, we had

- 26:00 to service them and look after them. I was actually in there I was looking after motor cycles for the provos [Provosts - Military Police], the army police.

**Did you like working on bikes?**

I loved 'em, yeah. Used to be able to road test 'em. Go round Albert Park Lake where they have the big car race in Melbourne now, the grand prix in Melbourne, Albert Park, that's where I used to road test the Harley

- 26:30 Davidsons [motorcycles], go round and round there. But yeah, I enjoyed the motor bikes. Well I...

**What size bikes were they?**

They were the 1942 WLA [model] Harley Davidson, seven hundred and fifty yeah, 750cc. Yeah, beautiful

old bike. I'd like to have one today actually, sittin' out there alongside my old vintage car. But yeah, I even

27:00 at times had to pull 'em out of brand new packing boxes and reassembled a couple of 'em like, or assembled 'em from brand new. They were still brand new from 1942 and they were still in the boxes.

**That must be satisfying or a rewarding experience to be able to assemble it from scratch and look after it?**

Yeah. I enjoyed all the work there, it was great.

**Were there any quirks to that bike or....?**

27:30 No, not really. A lot a people didn't like riding 'em and they probably wouldn't ride 'em today because they had a gear lever on the petrol tank. You didn't change gear, they were, they had 3 speeds and you had a foot clutch and a hand gear lever, which is back to front to motor bikes these days a course. They were pretty ungainly, big, old things but very comfortable to ride.

**What kind of suspension do they have?**

None

28:00 on the back and just sprung forks on the front, and the seat had a, the seat was actually sprung. It hinged at the front, it was a big, they didn't call it a seat, they called it a saddle. It was like sitting in a saddle on a horse I guess. It was shaped and it was leather and it was hinged on the front and it had a pole down the back and it suspended on a spring. But yeah, very comfortable to ride.

28:30 **They sound like an interesting bike. So what else happened during the, well 2 years that you were in the workshop there?**

Yeah 2, bit over 2 years.

**What was life, family life like in Melbourne?**

Pretty good. And in that 2 years there, well our second son came along. He was born in November 1960.

29:00 Seemed to like poppin' these kids out. A course I was only just 20 years old then and we'd shifted from the flat then and we'd moved a couple a, moved, we were only 2 or 3 months in a place in Balaclava in Melbourne and then we moved up to Eltham which is a suburb, was out a bit but you

29:30 had to get out a bit to get 'em cheap enough. But one thing probably cancelled out the other course it got out a bit then you had to pay more because you're using more petrol getting to and from work. But then when the second son was born, he was a blue baby. He had to have a complete blood change. That was a bit of a bit more of a thing. I used to have to, on the way to work I actually did a milk run. I had to c

30:00 he had to stay in the kids hospital in Melbourne for quite a while after he was born, and my wife had to express the milk and I had to take it with me on me way to work, I'd drop the milk off at the hospital. That was part of that bit.

**Sounds like it was fairly challenging experience.**

Yeah, well especially for a 20 year old sort a thing. But again we were, we thought we were invincible and we thought we were,

30:30 well very world wise at 20 years old then. Knew the lot.

**What kind of a social life did you have with the other blokes that you were working with in the workshop? Did you bond together?**

Not a heck of a lot probably because of the way the workshop was situated. Again it was at 5 o'clock everything was shut, it was locked down.

31:00 Most army establishments, there's someone there all the time like they're open, they're a going thing 24 hours a day. But this particular one a course it was just an 8 to 5, five days a week just like a civilian job, full stop, in a workshop or a service station. And it was about what you'd call it and it just went like that. Probably didn't get in the early days, anyhow didn't get to

31:30 bond as you put it, so much with the blokes. You just knew the blokes from day to day. Being army quite a few come and go, probably palled up with one. Well one chap who I ended up living out here when we moved to Eltham, a John Hamilton he was auto electrician there. In the end we used to take it in turns using our cars coming

32:00 to and from work and things like that. Probably John, just from off the top of my head now, I can't even think of the names of most of the people there. Bluey Buchanan was the ASM, the artificer's sergeant major, he was the boss of the workshop sort a thing. He was a, well was a hell of a nice fellow actually.

32:30 **What kind of a relationship did you have with him?**

Pretty good. Being a workshop he was, an ASM is not like an RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]. Your ASM is the artificer's sergeant major. He's the technical brains in the workshop sort a thing. A regimental sergeant major, he's a different kettle of fish. He's usually not very much liked and he does this sort of deliberately I guess. He's normally respected but not so much

33:00 liked. The regimental sergeant major, he's the bloke that's going to yell and sort a jump up and down, and you jump as high as he tells you. The artificer's sergeant major different kettle of fish. He's not going to be the yelling kind. He's going to impart his knowledge to you or he's gonna tell you what jobs he wants done trade wise, and things like that. And we got on pretty well.

**Did you learn a lot from him?**

Yes. Yeah.

33:30 Well that's part of the training. After doing the 12 months basic course it was still a learning curve, you were learning all the time. But you had the basic, hopefully had the basic knowledge from our 12 months in Bandiana and you'd go on to learning specifics then. Like learning how to fix a Holden

34:00 motor car as compared to a motor bike. You start pickin' the eyes out of 'em. But yeah, it was a good learning bit and then they posted, not posted me they, I had to go and run a little attachment from, still part of Melbourne area workshops but it was over at South Kensington and I had to go to the

34:30 ordnance depot, and my job was just to do small running repairs on vehicles that came in and had to be patched up waiting to go out maybe on a CMF [Citizens' Military Force] sort of exercise and that. The ordnance depot had big stocks of vehicles and supplies for Weekend Warriors, as we used to call some of them in those days. School camps and things, they'd go to this ordnance depot and they'd draw,

35:00 they'd get half a dozen trucks for the exercise and things like that. Over there as an attached mechanic I just had to check the vehicles out and make sure they were serviceable to go out on a next week, on another job. Have them ready to be issued out again.

**Was that a change of pace or...?**

Yeah, a little bit different. Plus, well in their own way they were teaching me responsibility. I was over there on my own.

35:30 I had to use my own nous a bit and that's how they, you digress on sort of, and they're making you use your head a bit yourself. You haven't got the ASM standing there to run to and say gee, will I do it this way or that way? You're doing it yourself and it's just relegating a bit more responsibility I s'pose,

36:00 and making you use your own brain.

**Did you enjoy having the extra responsibility?**

Yes. Yeah. In the meantime while I was there I had been, I had done some of my promotion exams. Like the main thing in the army is try and get a bit a promotion after a while. Course with promotion comes some extra money too so that's what it's all about really. Promotion of course gives you a little bit more authority and

36:30 you can start learning to yell at your underlings.

**How did you pursue the promotions? What were the exams you'd have to do?**

They had what they call a subject A, subject B and subject C for promotion. I can't remember how they went now it's so long ago, but one of the subjects would cover military law and things like that. The next subject would be

37:00 to do with man management and things like that. You had these three subjects and you had to qualify and then they were written into your army record of service, your AB-83. And promotion was another thing, they would, it's left to the ASM and the RSM, they will possibly recommend or not recommend if you're ready for promotion and things like that. And

37:30 I was qualified in early days like by the time I was 19 or 20 years old but obviously too young at that stage really for promotion, and I never got my first promotion until about 1962-63, but that was later on down the track. That was first promotion and then it took quite a while before I got my second

38:00 promotion. But it all comes into whether you're, I was gonna say, adult enough. That's not the word but.

**Just ready for the...?**

Ready for it, yeah.

**So how long were you looking after the equipment?**

Over at BOD [Base Ordnance Depot]? I dunno I think I was there about 6 months actually. It used to be a good little sort of a lurk in...



- 38:30 Well at one stage a more senior officer came down there because the vehicles also in this ordnance depot used to go out from there when their age limit was up and that for auction to civvy street, and people used to get their eye on something in particular. I know one day one of the big staff cars came up. I think it was a Humber Super Snipe and this officer came along and asked
- 39:00 me to bodgy up [tamper with] a spark plug and scatter dust all over it and make it look a bit tatty c he was going to go to the auction and bid for this thing. And these little sort a things used to go on. I guess this is gonna be around for ever but it went on. And these little things, so I'd go and bodgy up a spark plug and the thing'd sound like an old chaff cutter when they started it up at the auction,
- 39:30 and someone might a got something a little bit cheaper than what they wanted to pay for it.

**What kind of perks did you get for those favours?**

Nothin' really. I don't ever recollect you know maybe someone gave us a bottle a beer or something once. But no, it was more I think there and couple a times was if you didn't do it I sort of felt that he'd bring down the wrath a God on me or something like

- 40:00 that maybe. Like I was bloody scared of him probably. I don't know, I don't really recall but I know one, this officer did ask me to modify one a these slightly.

**So you felt obliged to?**

Well yes. Otherwise something might happen. Like he was an officer within the establishment that I was working in so he might a been able to make life a bit hard for me. I dunno. But anyway.

**I think most would've made the same choice as yourself in the**

- 40:30 **position.**

## Tape 3

- 00:32 **Rod are you on your way to Sydney around about now?**

Yes. I think I put in for a posting from memory, although usually about 2 years they used to try and move you on a bit anyhow. So anyway the company sergeant major who is the bloke in charge of the office in Melbourne area workshops, he came up to me one day

- 01:00 and he said, "Rod we've got a posting order here for you." So he handed it to me and it said to 1Battalion Royal Australian Regiment in Holsworthy in Sydney. And I looked at it and I'd never heard of this joint. What's this all about goin' to an infantry battalion. So I ask a bit more about it and they said you're probably just like RAEME attached

- 01:30 to fix vehicles and that. No one down that neck a the woods had heard anything about this. So needless to say I... At that stage one of my brothers was over from Western Australia on holidays so I said I'll leave my old car. This was the old Ford Zephyr I'd got a bit early, but she'd come to grief. I'd rolled it over and it was still a bit dented. But anyway, I got into trouble with that one and I couldn't get insurance on it so we just patched it up and I kept driving it. But I said to my brother he could

- 02:00 keep the car and they could drive through to Sydney and I'd get the army to send me. They could send me on the train or something, which did happen. And I got to Sydney in, trying to think a the time, it must a been about May or June 1962, I think. And got off the train in Liverpool and I think there was a, I can't remember whether I had to find

- 02:30 my way or I cadged a lift. Cause I didn't have a clue where I was goin', but I'd got to this whoppin' great city and again it's, Sydney's bigger than Melbourne and everything's getting bigger. And eventually found my way out to 1 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. Well I think I was posted there in round about mid way 1962, and

- 03:00 my course all fit to post me out in 1965. But I think that coming three years in 1Battalion, some of the best army years a my life I reckon.

**Were you actually looking for a bit of a change after being in Melbourne?**

I think so. The army to me was still the adventure. I guess I was still looking for it and in some ways a little, I was a little bit irresponsible, family-wise

- 03:30 I mean. In retrospect this is, I can see it now. Anyway, I got posted to 1 Battalion and there was a sergeant mechanic and corporal mechanic and 2 or 3 craftsmen counting myself. Craftsmen being, instead of in RAEME, well anyone

- 04:00 conversant with army terms and that you're a private in the infantry, that's the lowest you can be. In RAEME you're a craftsman is the lowest rank. And our prime objective was looking after, I think it was

75 Land Rovers which the battalion had half a dozen trucks and various other small bits of mechanical equipment. They also had the same number of... No not the same

04:30 number. They had 3 or 2, or 3 armourers they were, RAEME tradesmen. They're prime job objective was to look after the weapons. Because an infantry battalion, at that stage you had about 800 odd men and they all had a gun and they all had to be looked after, so.

**Sounds like you had your hands full.**

Yeah, there was always quite a bit to do and...

**What did your wife..?**

It was interesting.

**Sorry what**

05:00 **did your wife think about the transfer to Sydney?**

Well, I got transferred to Sydney and then she, my wife, and by that time yeah, there was still only the 2 kids but she was pregnant with a third one. But anyway, I got shunted off to Sydney and then she couldn't come straight away. I was waiting for married quarters in Sydney. We were going straight from married quarters in Melbourne and they said we could have married quarters in Sydney

05:30 but couldn't get 'em straight away. And it was some must a been about 6 months before. But I used to travel from Melbourne to Sydney every fortnight, drive in the old Zephyr. Used to take me 10 hours to drive from Sydney to Melbourne, in those days the Hume Highway's not much better than a billy goat track either, just quietly. It was twisty and windy and...

**When you mentioned that you thought you might a**

06:00 **been a little bit irresponsible at the time, was that in relation to getting the transfer to Sydney?**

Yeah, I don't think I put in for it but I wanted to go somewhere else, and in some ways I think now or I feel now that I was ducking some of my responsibilities at home. I think because later on, like we eventually we did separate. But...

**Still having...**

That was part of it I think.

06:30 **Having three kids at the age of what 21?**

Well, the third one's still not quite there but there's a little bit of a story with him too. I dunno whether you want to go into that just yet or not, we might leave that for a minute.

**We'll get there.**

We'll get there, yes.

**We'll get there. So did you actually end up in married quarters?**

Yes. I eventually got a brand new house in a brand new army housing

07:00 village and I got the first house and I thought that was pretty good. And we had this nice brand new home and Marlene eventually got there with the two kids and got all organised. And it was, well it was pretty good having a house after living in a flat, like the army quarters we had in Melbourne was a 3 bedroom flat. It was multi-storey,

07:30 it was, bedrooms were upstairs, it was a bit of a rat race. It was, even though it was army married quarters it was part of a state housing commission block of flats and some of it was pretty rugged. Like they were brand new but there was some pretty wild people, I s'pose is a way to put it. They were draggin' people off the streets and everywhere and... But we were just pleased to be in married quarters at that stage.

**How far away were you from the base in the quarters?**

08:00 'Bout a mile. We were just about camped. The quarters were actually in, it was called Holsworthy Village and the Holsworthy area of, just out of Sydney near Liverpool, is a big army area.

**How big's the actual base at Holsworthy?**

Do you mean just the one battalion or there is there's an infantry. Well there was an infantry battalion,

08:30 an artillery regiment. Yeah, mainly the artillery and the infantry. And then the right on our back doorstep, one of my kids got out there one day, was the Anzac rifle range that was right behind us. And the actual Holsworthy army training area runs into some, I dunno it could be

09:00 a hundred or so square kilometres. I dunno it's pretty big.

**Pretty substantial all right.**

Because it's... Yes, it's a field firing range for heavy artillery like further out but that's all part of the Holsworthy area. But, well in those days like the battalion consisted of 800 or a thousand blokes or whatever it was, and then the artillery regiment there was, there's probably a couple a thousand probably 3,000 soldiers there

09:30 just on the Holsworthy part. But Holsworthy joins up with the Ingleburn and Casula areas and you've got all the ancillary repair men, fix-it men, publicity people the whole lot. Like everything that goes along with a whole army really, everything was there.

**What was the workshop like there?**

The workshop as such that we had at the battalion

10:00 was only a lean-to.

**What does that mean?**

It was sort of like a back veranda stuck on a bit of a shed and we had some stores inside. Any vehicles you just drove up under the lean-to and repaired them. We didn't do what they called major repairs, they were only minor running repairs. Changing, we'd go as far as putting a new gear box, changing a gear box or something like that if that was necessary.

10:30 But most of it was just servicing and supervising drivers. Like in an infantry battalion you've got 80-odd Land Rovers 70 or 80 Land Rovers, each vehicle has its designated driver and then each driver is responsible for the servicing of the vehicle under RAEME supervision. So we were there to supervise, tell the bloke you know, what oils to change and do things like that. We would do any

11:00 technical, minor technical things like tune ups and things like that. But in a lot a ways more in a supervisory capacity with, in conjunction with the driver of the vehicle and he was your lackey and you sat there and told him what to do. And that was primarily what our job was. There was no way that, well the sergeant. The sergeant in a battalion, the sergeant motor mechanic he doesn't really do any work. He's

11:30 the boss. So he's, c I ended up sort of in the same situation myself eventually, and you didn't, you can wear a collar and tie to work, you didn't have to wear overalls. But there's no way that 3 sort of, maybe 4 in some cases, working mechanics were going to do all the repairs that were required of a, of that many 4 wheel drive vehicles that were most of the time out in the bush and getting hammered

12:00 pretty well.

**Sure. How bout fixing guns? Did that keep you busy?**

Guns wasn't. I wasn't myself involved in that. But the armourers as they're called yeah, they that's a full on job. Doing minor repairs again on them. Like if something, if a rifle or something. Because by then, by the time I got posted to battalion the old .303 rifles

12:30 were out and they were then using the SLR, which is self loading rifle, which had come into service in around about 1960 they had a pretty full time job keeping everything working and also periodical servicing. Although each soldier you, when you're in the army you've got your own rifle

13:00 and you keep that while your in that particular unit and its your responsibility you make sure it works all the time. And if you've got a problem with it, if it doesn't work that's when you take it to the armourer and say look such and such seems to be wrong with this and he's got a fix it then. But yeah, it's a full on job.

**Would they be attached to you in any way, the armourers?**

No, not really. The only way they're attached is that they come from the same corps, they still belong to RAEME.

13:30 Well one a my best friends was the corporal armourer who I had known back from the Puckapunyal days, he was an older Pom [English]. But old Ted Bolton, bless his soul, he's dead now. But, well he was old to me. Like when I first met him in 1957 in Puckapunyal, I gotta remember that I was only 17 and he was probably about 25. He

14:00 was an old bugger to me then. But then we went on and I knew him for all my service career and then I was out of the army when he passed on, but his wife did let me know that he'd gone.

**With such a large base at Holsworthy was there any social aspect to having a base with so many men there?**

Each, like 1Battalion had their own service canteen as it's called,

14:30 or a big service club for the other ranks. Like other ranks being private and corporal. Sergeants have their own sergeants' mess and officers go on and they have their own thing. But for the married personnel we had, there was a army married quarters canteen which I used to, in those days I used to

spend a bit more time there

15:00 than I should have done too probably, because I'd go down after work or after tea and have a few beers and game a darts with different people and get in. The wife couldn't go because she had little kids, she would be left home to look after the kids and I'd go down and have me game a darts. This didn't help things in time to come a 'course, but I guess that's part of life in some respects, in a lot of places.

15:30 **Did the other blokes that you were playing darts with, were they all married as well?**

Not all of them no, because they were able to intermingle, and even at that stage, this was in 1962-3-4, there was still some troops away in, there was Borneo was on, there was still some Malaya I think, and different

16:00 places so there was the odd woman on the loose as well.

**Women on the loose?**

Yeah. And they used to frequent places like the canteens and things like that around town, and the blokes, the young blokes and things from the... There was a whole battalion 800 blokes camped just up 500 metres up the road so, yeah, people used to get around.

16:30 But most, a lot of the army villages were quite often known as Peyton Place [TV serial] and things like that, because you've got such a high turnover of, well not a turnover but a there's a lot of people left on their own at times, and the army I feel, or any service life is not an ideal married situation unfortunately.

17:00 But that's a fact of life and that's just the way it is. But again, in some ways that's where I feel now that possibly, I feel now that I may have been a bit irresponsible. It was a way of, and an excuse of ducking some responsibilities I guess. But yeah, if the kids were screamin' too loud, bugger it. I'm goin' back to work. It was too easy I suppose. That's,

17:30 maybe I'm being a bit self critical, I dunno. But all these things help to unhelp a marriage I think.

**Nicely put. But I can certainly understand you know, with the intensity of the life and the closeness that you are to being able to get away and just you know, walk into a less stressful situation.**

Yes.

**It's almost you know human nature really.**

Yeah. If things were a bit rough at home

18:00 or the kids were carrying on or something, well yeah, just I'm goin' over the boozers for a while or something like that.

**Were wives encouraged to go along to the married...?**

Yeah, if they wanted to there was nothing stopping them. But in most cases most of us were the same age group. You're looking at an age group from 20 to 30. 30 was probably pretty old,

18:30 and most of them are young. Like in the married quarters situation most of 'em young couples with 1 or 2 kids and they're only little takers, and sure some people lobbed in at the canteen like lock stock and barrel with the kids squawkin' and all you know. But it's not a very ideal, not good sort of a situation, and I didn't think it was real good my wife comin' down and bringin' the kids with

19:00 her. She wasn't allowed in the bloody canteen. I was but she wasn't. I dunno whether that sounds very hard to believe.

**Were there things that were family barbeque sort of a days that would..?**

Not really, probably not enough, no. There was the odd ones but very odd ones. But I think if there had been more organised family type things, they

19:30 possibly do today. I dunno, I've lost contact with most army stuff now a course. They possibly, they even do look into this sort of a thing now. I think it's something that wanted addressing and whether it has been addressed and sort of something done about it. But yeah, it's too easy I think probably. If they reckon there's a 50% divorce rate or whatever the

20:00 rate is now sort of Australia wide, then there's probably a 90% divorce rate in the services. That's the way I would look at it. That's if things still happen the same now as what they used to back in my time in the army, like in the '60's '70's.

**It certainly doesn't sound like the situation was set up to incorporate family life.**

No, it's not.

**It was the army life or...**

It's army, you're in the army and you're a soldier

20:30 first and that sort of, I think that was reflected all the way through. A wife was of little significance. Well actually, if I may go on just a little bit. Our third son, he was born in 1962 while, late November 1962, then

21:00 it must a been he wasn't even, he was about 12 months old or something, I should remember these things, but being a typical Dad, Mums are made to remember these things. He went to sleep for about 9 months and he was in the kids hospital, and when he came out of it he was about 12 months old or something like that when it happened. And they never, even to this day his mother

21:30 or myself don't really know what happened. No one could tell us what happened c he was 12 months, he was a beautiful little kid and just went to sleep. And when he woke up he was physically and mentally handicapped

**Gee.**

Cause part of the brain and things went wrong. But then the night that he was rushed off to hospital I was on duty. I was the duty corporal at 1Battalion c we still had to be part of battalion running, and we had to carry out any duties

22:00 that the infants might do. And anyway, I was duty corporal and the Marlene had rang me to say Dennis was very sick or something and then she'd taken him into hospital. But whoever she spoke to first was the duty officer and they more or less said well he's on duty he can't leave. And anyway, in the end I heard about it later, the matron from Liverpool hospital got on the phone and she got onto the duty officer or whoever

22:30 it was at 1Battalion and told him in no uncertain terms what she thought of him, and to let Corporal Goater get into this hospital. Get him in here straight away this kid is critical ill. Because they didn't know what it was then, and he's on the critical list. And, but that's just another way of thinking in the army. The army weren't too worried about my kid. They're more worried about me. That's the way the cookie crumbles. That's the way it used to

23:00 work. And as I say, I guess it's changed. In some ways I hope it has changed. But that's the way it was.

**Did you end up getting into the hospital?**

Yes, I wasn't on duty then. I was, after things had got sorted out and things were, I ended up sittin' by him for I dunno a week or something I think c he was initially taken into Liverpool hospital and then transferred to the Royal Children's Hospital in Sydney.

23:30 Well, that was, yeah it was all in Sydney. But yes, he was a very sick little boy, and well still is actually. They told me in 1960 or told his mother and myself that if he lived to be any more than 17 years old he'd be very lucky. He's still alive today. I haven't seen him for a long time. He doesn't know me. I used to go and see him

24:00 and it used to upset me that much in the end to get... After I got out of the army we had him, c well later on Marlene and I separated and I ended up, that's a bit more of a story a bit later on really, but I've lost it somewhere, excuse me. I've just lost where I was.

**That's all right. You were just saying that you haven't seen,**

24:30 **is it Dennis?**

Dennis, I haven't seen him now for 15 years I guess but when I used to go and see him he just wouldn't know me, all he'd want to do was run off with the kids. And even a little bit later on when he was, well last time c he's, well he's 40 odd years old now.

**Do you feel that because of your army commitments you weren't**

25:00 **available enough for your family, particularly when there was a health crisis on with... ?**

Well, that is part and parcel I think of what led to our eventual divorce, our separation and our eventual divorce, I think it all helped. I should've, well Dennis, we had Dennis then and I volunteered, I wanted to go to Vietnam with 1Battalion, right or wrong, because they were the first battalion to go in

25:30 1965, and then...

**Cause that would a been pretty close though to when your son was sick, is that right or not?**

A little bit, yeah. He was home then and he was full on like, to look after. But all I wanted to do was go with 1Battalion. Now whether that was being irresponsible as far as the family was concerned, and then I'm looking at the other side

26:00 and my commitment to 1Battalion. I sort of loved being with 1Battalion and then when my corps, in it's wisdom, I wanted to go with them and somewhere, I don't think it was written anywhere, it probably wasn't but the corps answer when I wanted to go with 'em they posted me out and I squawked. They

posted me back to a base workshop. And I said I want to go with 1Battalion, and their

26:30 words were, "You are too familiar with the unit you're with, and it's not good." And that was my corps said that.

**So what's the story there? I thought it was you know, an advantage to actually...?**

Well, I would a thought but that's what they, that was their story at the time. Someone in their wisdom made that statement.

**Buy why is that a negative if you're too familiar?**

Well, that's the, I dunno. I couldn't understand it.

**What, still to this day you can't understand it?**

No, they posted me out, they put me back to 2 Base Workshop. They had to find

27:00 someone to fill my position. I was a corporal then, I was actually, that was my first promotion. I was promoted in 1Battalion to corporal and I was all set to go. I knew how the place ran and everything, and actually I'd been running it like I think at that stage I was on HDA [Higher Duties Allowance] for sergeant. Like the sergeant had left and they were in the throes of changing over and I was being paid as a sergeant to look after the joint.

**Is this still in Holsworthy?**

1Battalion?

**Yeah?**

27:30 I'm not sure where they are. I've got an idea they're in Darwin actually. The corps sent me back to 1Battalion and I squawked that long, and it was only a matter of, I think 6 weeks after being posted out a.... Well they had me on the [HMAS] Sydney because I went to Vietnam on the Sydney we were the first troops after 1Battalion to go to Vietnam, and here I am on the Sydney and I only had 24 hours notice then

28:00 to get ready - "You're goin' on the Sydney to go to Vietnam."

**Were you reposted to a different place after you'd put in the request that you wanted to go to Vietnam?**

Yes, I was posted to 3 Field Troops. Out of a base workshops and into a unit that was brand new formed unit, it was actually. No one knew anyone really when they all got together.

**And where were you actually based ?**

3 Field Troop?

**Yeah.**

It was formed at

28:30 Casula which is right alongside Holsworthy. It's all part of the big army complex all around there.

**Gotcha.**

I'm sorry the...

**It's OK I just had a bit of a location confusion.**

Couldn't work it out, yeah. The Holsworthy, Ingleburn, Casula is all round Liverpool or all south of Liverpool in Sydney, is all an army area and all these units were coming out of that area. And probably that whole army

29:00 area around Sydney was in those days the biggest army area and biggest assembly of Australian Army anywhere in Australia. Its different now I think, you've got Townsville and Darwin and things like that. But yes, I was posted out of 2 Base Workshops. They just came to me and said you to be at, "Report over to Casula tomorrow

29:30 morning," or something. And I got over there and they said bring all your army kit with ya, you'll be on the Sydney whenever, on Thursday, sailing out of Sydney for Vietnam.

**So all this squawking finally got you somewhere.**

Well yeah, with my corps it did, yeah. It got me back out of a base workshop because I didn't like base workshops.

**What's wrong with base workshops according to you?**

It's too much of the same thing and I wanted excitement

30:00 I guess and adventure or something. Cause all the time I was at 1 Battalion they were the first battalion that was put on green or red alerts and things like that, when something was happening and I was just all up tight ready to go wherever they wanted. It didn't matter about me wife and 3 kids sitting at home and one of those kids pretty sick. I just wanted to go.

**Well all your mates were going.**

Yeah.

**You didn't want to be left out.**

30:30 Yes.

**Were you following what was going on in the Vietnam War in any capacity?**

No, not really. Well there wasn't a heck of a lot about it really. We no one knew anything about it. The Australian government never knew anything about it. We were on the stinking old troop ship the Sydney which was a converted, well I dunno what they converted, it was an ex-navy aircraft

31:00 carrier which should have been scrapped 20 years before that. You could walk out on the little, I can't remember what you call 'em now on the side of the flight deck, you could walk out and if you weren't careful your foot went straight through. They were just all rusty.

**Gee.**

We drove vehicles onto the deck of it in Sydney when we were putting the vehicles, and drivin' you couldn't go very fast with the vehicle because the deck was like just big waves like. God help the last person that landed an aeroplane

31:30 on it. Obviously it had got worse. You couldn't land an aeroplane on it the way it was when we were using it.

**Was it difficult getting the equipment on board?**

No, they just drove it on, most off the docks and that. But it was just the state of the actual ship. It stunk down below. It, I dunno how many times I got, well it probably happens very easily on ships, cockroaches in everything. You

32:00 had to watch out what you're eatin' and things like that. But we had 17 days on it. At that stage the navy treated that trip to Vietnam on the Sydney, the navy treated it as an army, as an exercise, a training exercise and we were 17 days on it going up through the, over the equator and all that thing. And a 'course you gotta remember that there's no air conditioning or anything stupid like that on the ship.

32:30 And I can't remember off hand how many men there was on it when we went up there. There must have been a thousand or more blokes, be more than that and in the end I myself and several other blokes, instead of sleeping down in the decks where they wanted you to sleep we took our hammocks and put 'em up in the fo'c'sle, which is right up the front of the ship just where the anchors and that go out,

33:00 because it was so hot and stuffy and most, a lot of us were suffering from seasickness and things like that.

**How did you go with your seasickness?**

No good. That was the only way I could stop from feeling crook was be up in the fo'c'sle where the fresh air was coming straight through. But yeah, 17 days and I think even the old Sydney was able to do the trip in something like 8 or 10 days or something. I just forget now, I did read. But they went via,

33:30 we stopped in Subic Bay and when they stopped that was worse 'c Subic Bay is not far off the equator and it was putrid. We weren't allowed off the ship or anything. But eventually got to Vietnam and they loaded us onto landing craft and took us ashore. We didn't know whether we were gonna get shot at, thrown rocks at or what and nor did the powers to be.

**What**

34:00 **had they told you about Vietnam in general?**

I don't... No one knew a lot I don't think. The, well just shifting a little bit there I have a book here that was written about our unit but the skipper does make note of when he was asked to go and interview the boss of engineers in Australia.

34:30 He states in this book that he asked the engineer boss what his role was to be in Vietnam, and his boss being some fairly high ranking officer obviously told him to, just be like an engineer and do an engineers job. They didn't have a clue. And no one knew. But, well Vietnam was a new war and as it turns out a useless sort of war really. But...

35:00 **Were you told what your duties in any capacity would be, what sort of role?**

As a unit? Yes we were to, originally we went to Bien Hoa but they had been told to, they would be assisting 1 Battalion in any mine clearing, being engineers that's one of their first up jobs, is

35:30 clearing mine fields, checking out tunnels if they found any, because it was known that there was some tunnel complexes and things in Vietnam. And part of the units job, 3 Field Troops unit, as a unit's job was to assist in the clearing and checking out and well, it wasn't to assist in. They were to check out. They were gonna be the first blokes. Well they,

36:00 the book is called The Original Tunnel Rats, who they were. They, our blokes went down. Not me. That wasn't part of my job. My job with 3 Field Troop was to help well look after their, we had a bit of engineering equipment some bulldozers, a grader, or we didn't have a grader, a few tip trucks and things like that. But my job was to look after their mechanical things like that, and I had a

36:30 toolbox in a little canvas roll with some tools in it and that was it.

**Gee. Did that equipment that you just mentioned, did that come out on the Sydney with you?**

Yes, everything came on the Sydney. Yeah, we had five TD15 B dozers. A couple of little Fowler, smaller little tractors. A D-4 Caterpillar dozer. Five tip trucks I think it was. Three or four

37:00 Land Rovers, and yes, everything came on the Sydney with us. On the Sydney when we went over there was our 3 Field Troop which consisted of 68 men it turned out. 68 of us. 161 recce [reconnaissance] flight, who was the Australian Army Air Force, I s'pose is one way of puttin' it, I s'pose reconnaissance flight. 105 Field

37:30 Regiment. We may've, and they, we made up the, what they call the 1RAR group and we were all posted initially on Bien Hoa air force base in Vietnam.

**How did your wife receive the news 24 hours prior to you going to Vietnam that you were actually gonna go to Vietnam?**

I can't really...

38:00 I can't remember the actual...

**Did it come as a shock?**

Well I doubt whether it would a come as a shock because she knew I wanted to go. One way, or like I'd been for months, well when 1 Battalion was told that they were going in about April, I think April of 1965, and I said

38:30 to Marlene then, "Oh well, I'll be goin' to Vietnam with 1 Battalion," and that then didn't happen. So she sort a knew that I was wantin' to go. And then she knew that I was squawking blue murder in the base workshops just down the road, which again was still in the same area in Sydney. That was only bout 3 or 4 miles from Holsworthy where I had been. Her reaction, I can't remember off hand. I've got an

39:00 idea that there was a fair bit of a squawk goin' on. More or less to the effect you're gonna go off and leave me with these three kids. That's about what it would a been. And as I said, I never had much notice. Well that's the way it panned out. About 24 hours, so we didn't have too long to argue the toss anyway, then it happened.

**Did you do anything in particular as far as preparation was concerned for**

39:30 **Vietnam?**

Training-wise you mean, in that way?

**Well, just even personally preparing yourself for...?**

No, again I didn't have time. I just, they just said come with your... You've got your initial kit that your issued with in the army and you're always s'pose to have it in a state of readiness type a thing, and that's chunked in. I had a kit bag when I went. An old brown army kit bag,

40:00 which is about that long and that round, that was full a me gear and I had me haversack, and you had your belt and your basic pouches and that was it. You got issued a gun, which I was issued a Owen gun at, over at Casula. This was still in Sydney prior to going on and going down and getting on the Sydney. And everything has to be real early morning we, I dunno we were packin' up in the dark

40:30 to go down and start boarding the Sydney.

**Did you all have Owen guns?**

No, there was only a few of us. I think some a the platoon corporals and that had Owen guns, c as it turned out the Owen gun was not much good for later on. I know really in later patrols and things like I did go out on one or two patrols off Bien Hoa and we had been advised never take an Owen gun.

41:00 We used to swap it with one a the blokes and grab an SLR, the other rifle. Owen gun, it was good in it's day I guess but you could just about spit a bullet further than an Owen gun.



**It's a lovely description really of the inability of the Owen gun to hold up under the conditions.**

They'd keep working but they'd just weren't very efficient, I s'pose is the word.

## **Tape 4**

00:30 **Can you describe the landing at Vung Tau?**

It's sort of a bit vague. We, all of us on the Sydney when she pulled up we were about, I don't know couple a miles off shore I think. Vung Tau is the actual landing area in Vietnam where they were disembarking troops off the Sydney.

01:00 Saigon itself of course, was the main city but Saigon is up the river, it's not right on the coast. We were I s'pose, the best word to call it on Sydney when we were told righto we're goin' off now or whatever it is. We were all very apprehensive because we didn't know and no one could tell us what to expect.

01:30 They unloaded us into landing barges which is just a four, a small...

**Sorry we're just going to have to pause again their Rod. I think you were just about to describe how you were feeling onboard as you were coming in to land.**

Yes, I think I was probably the same as everyone else. Very apprehensive.

02:00 Just absolutely didn't know what to expect. They landed us onto these landing craft and we putted in towards the shore, and we were probably all seeing the battle of Coral Sea or something, fought again on old films that we've seen of the Americans raiding the beaches and all this sort a thing, and duckin' bullets and we were weren't too sure whether this is what we were gonna be doing or what. So the landing barge trundled

02:30 up to the beach and the door dropped and we all got told by some sergeant, "C'mon move, move!" And we tore off up the beach and then slowed down and there was no bullets. And anyway, next thing we saw a couple of Vietnamese women and some kids and they were sellin' Pepsi Colas to us. It was a little bit of an

03:00 anti-climax I s'pose you might say, and that was our introduction to the enemy soil I s'pose. It, yeah it was nothing like any of us I'd say dreamed it was gonna be like. We thought we were off to war and we were still met with a bottle of Pepsi Cola.

**How long were you on the beach for during the landing?**

We walked straight up and just walked up and

03:30 further off the beach, just up into the low shrubbery and stuff on the side, and it's a bit vague. I just can't remember now, someone got us into some semblance of order and then they loaded us onto some trucks and we camped somewhere, had to camp over night I think, yeah, they camped us overnight with another Yank unit in Vung Tau. And then the

04:00 next day, c the Hercules weren't allowed to fly at night or something to that effect. Anyhow, and then the next day they flew us, yeah I think we flew to Bien Hoa from Vung Tau.

**How far is Bien Hoa from Vung Tau?**

It's not very far. It's only, I dunno from memory about 50 miles I think. It's only a short hop. But the area between Vung Tau

04:30 and Bien Hoa was s'posed to have been a bad area like, s'posed to have been lots a baddies in there or something. And most a the, at that stage there wasn't open travel between, on the roads between Vung Tau and Bien Hoa .

**So is this the first time you've been aboard a Hercules?**

Yes, it had been. Yeah, I hadn't been on a Herc [Hercules] before.

**What was that experience like?**

05:00 Noisy. Yeah, quite a different thing hopping into a Herc and going for a ride, but at that stage a the game I don't think I'd even flown in a big aeroplane in my life before from memory. I don't think I had. But all of this stuff was all part of the big adventure I guess.

**Was that at Tan Son Nhut airport?**

05:30 Saigon is Tan Son Nhut.

**Is it? What's the name of the airport at Vung Tau?**

I dunno. It's probably a dirt strip. It'd just be Vung Tau. But Tan Son Nhut is still I s'pose the international airport at Ho Chi Minh City now though isn't it? But it's possibly still called Tan Son Nhut, I don't know.

**What was your first impression of Bien Hoa ?**

Big. It was big.

06:00 Yeah, I s'pose you could just about say awe inspiring because we came in there and there was just aeroplanes goin' everywhere, helicopters, jets, everything, noise. So much noise that, because Bien Hoa at that stage was the biggest US [United States] military base in Vietnam. I can't remember, I know I was told at some stage but I can't even hazard a guess at how many troops there was based around

06:30 Bien Hoa airport. But certainly a big place and a very big strip. Like a big, it wasn't just a little landing strip, it was a major airport.

**How were you greeted by the Americans?**

Just, I really can't say off hand. I'd imagine they probably said, "Hi guy," or something like that. But,

07:00 yeah we were still a bit I think, in awe of everything that was going on around us because even our commanding officer he, well he was the same age as I was. Like we were all kids even though we were all regular army. At that stage national service hadn't come into being and at that stage we were all regular soldiers, but again we were all very raw

07:30 young regular soldiers. Several of the fellas in our unit had not long before come back from Borneo, but in the main most of us probably hadn't been off Australian shores. let alone anything else and it just all... Yes, everything was so big, and a course the Yanks do things in bucket fulls not in handfuls.

**What outfit of,**

08:00 **what outfit did the Americans have at Bien Hoa?**

Well we the 1RAR Group as they were called which consisted of 1Battalion and then 3 Field Troop, 105 Field Regiment 161 Recces [reconnaissance] Flight, and a few more a them, were all attached to the 173rd Airborne Division of the Americans. Their division consists of, I dunno

08:30 three battalions I think it was, or two battalions I can't remember, and all the ancillary units that make these things work and make them go together. There was other units on Bien Hoa as well as the 173rd but they were who we were attached to, and they were who we actually ate in their mess and things until we got settled down on Bien Hoa airport in our own little area.

**Can you describe**

09:00 **how you got settled down?**

Well, we didn't have much as a unit. We had some tents and things like that but they took us into Bien Hoa and they dropped us off in the 173rd Airborne Engineer unit battalion's area and then they hosted us for a couple of, 2 days I think it was, or something like that. We did actually eat in their mess for

09:30 a couple a days more than that. And then, by then we had sort of started getting our area organised which was just a bit of sandy, squashy, soggy ground and we put our tents up on it. But everything was wet, it rained well over there at that time a the year it was, I think it was, yeah it was still doin' it then. You'd get rain about 4 o'clock in the afternoon,

10:00 but everything is damp and soggy all the time. We were trying to, again it goes back to being soldiers first and then the other part of your job later on, but the first thing we had to do was secure the area in as much as we had some weapon pits to hop in if someone started shooting at us, because we were on the perimeter of the base and we formed part of the security perimeter of the

10:30 air base. And in that role we had to have our weapon pits and things and be able to guard our little bit a territory. And if you're trying to set up a bit of a camp where you can sleep and eat and things, and also being new in country wonder where the next bullet was comin' from. We hadn't seen the first one yet but where the next one was coming from, which in that area there was always the danger,

11:00 it was always there apparently. Not that I ever saw it happen in that particular part of it. Not close up anyhow. There was always the danger of someone comin' in and havin' a couple a shots at you, so we were told. So you walked around and moved around the area in anticipation of something happening. I s'pose you're a little bit on tenterhooks all the time and you've gotta be, and its only natural especially when you don't know.

11:30 But being good old Aussies I s'pose, after a while, like after some time, I dunno it could a been a week or a month you become a bit complacent. You become used to it and you get used to your surrounds and I s'pose complacency is the word to use. Otherwise I think you'd go troppo sort of anyhow.

12:00 **Can you describe the kind of patrols you were doing at Bien Hoa?**

I only ever went out on one or two I think it was, but they were clearing patrols what they call clearing patrols and things at night. I don't know, I got an idea whether I had to go or whether I volunteered. Having to go and volunteering in the army sometimes is one in the same thing. Anyway, I went on a couple of patrols but out in the

- 12:30 evening and just to go out and check and make sure that there was no one out there. As a soldier sometimes I think maybe I wasn't a real good soldier because I used to think to myself well if they're out there and they didn't want to be seen, well we probably wouldn't see 'em. If they're out there and they're got a machine gun, well that'll be the end of us anyhow. Cause
- 13:00 we'd never, I for one and I don't think any of the other chaps probably any a the one or two patrols I went on too had probably never been fired on. So whether we'd been taught well enough to react. Obviously, they seemed to think the Australians were generally taught pretty well and knew how to react even though it had never happened to them. I'd like to think that we all would've reacted the right way and been able to get out of it if something had happened.
- 13:30 Fortunately we probably, it never did happen. Not on any patrols I was in.

**How did you I suppose, what sort of relationship did you form with the 173rd while you were there?**

Probably fairly close. Once we got ourselves pretty well set up in the end, what with begging, borrowing and

- 14:00 stealing different commodities. Like in building materials we ended up putting wooden floors in our tents. We completely drained our area and things like that. We were fortunate because being an engineer unit we had the likes of little backhoes and things like that we could dig drains and dig weapon pits with a machine. The poor old foot soldier, the infanteer, he would a given his right arm for one a these little backhoes or a bit of earth moving
- 14:30 equipment to do some of these things. But we ended up, the Australian government in one of their better moods one time sent us a Kingstrand hut which was a demountable type of a building that you, and it was supposedly to be our kitchen and mess hut but the boss called us all together and said well we're doin' all right with our tent mess huts and things like that, he said, "How 'bout
- 15:00 we build a boozer or a canteen come thing out of our steel hut, which we ended up doing." And we acquired a couple of poker machines and we had our own beer supplies which we had, our little book goes into. I had forgotten some parts of it but I did have a bit of a read about it. Most cases the boys had a beer source. The Yanks, mostly American beer at
- 15:30 that stage, we never had any Australian beer. The Yank [American] beer was like lemonade we all reckoned. Well it's a lot lower alcohol content than the Australian beer. But the Americans with their beer, when it came in cartons if there was one can broken or something they used to chuck the box out or chuck it into a stock pile. And anyway, some of our boys got onto where they could get it and they used to go and they'd, the Yanks'd give it to 'em. And there'd be nothin' wrong with the other
- 16:00 cans. It'd just be one was busted or something like that. So we had a pretty good supply of beer and we used to drink a bloody lot a beer too, which probably wasn't good but anyway, that was part of it. Like you'd probably have six cans a beer before you go and have tea at night and things like that. But then we had our poker machines. And anyway a few a the our Yank friends they used to like
- 16:30 coming over and joining in our festivities which used to carry on. Like we'd still have to do our own border picket, like they had you were rostered for duty at night and that, so if you were going to be on duty sometime well you didn't go and get on the grog. It was a pretty bad offence if you were caught in the boozer when you were known to be going on guard duty at 10 o'clock and you were in the boozer at 8 o'clock, you could be in all sorts of trouble.
- 17:00 But the Yanks used to come over and there was one Yank in particular, black as the stand your light's on there, but a hell of a nice fella. But he could play the ukulele, not the ukulele, the fiddle, and he was unreal. He'd get there and he used to chomp on a big cigar and he'd just, he'd chew on it. I don't think I ever saw it alight and he'd get goin' with his fiddle and sometimes he'd make that thing talk. And that was
- 17:30 sort of our entertainment. I don't think none of our guys in our unit, no one was sort of musically inclined I don't think, so we had to, we had a juke box but it was nothin' like... Some a these blokes'd come in and they'd bring a whatever they might play. But this one in particular he, I remember him quite vividly. We became quite good friends as far as, you know, the sort of, swap yarns about where you came from and things like that. I don't,
- 18:00 I can't even remember now where he did come from. But he was a big black fella, but hell of a nice fella.

**Sounds like you had hours of fun in that boozer.**

Our boozer. We made a lot a money actually and we were able to get ourselves better equipped than some of the other camps. Like we did acquire a big generator set. With our gear, when we came from

Australia we had a little 2kVA [1000 volt amperes]

- 18:30 Honda gen [generator] set, and that was supposed to be our power supply. Each of, there was two mechanics and one armourer and they were the three RAEME blokes attached to this 3 Field Troop, we had a tool roll each which consisted, it was a canvas thing, it folded out. It was about that wide and it had a few spanners and screwdrivers. That was our tool kit and that's what we had to keep these bulldozers and things goin' with,
- 19:00 and more or less things like that. And anyway we went down to Saigon one time and ended up at this American salvage yard and it had all sorts in it. Like there was helicopters and aeroplanes, and you name it there was all sorts there, and they didn't care what they gave away. But you couldn't take three of one to make one, that was part of the... You couldn't go in and
- 19:30 say oh gee, we could make something. Anyway we, Alec McGregor the skipper, and myself and someone else we were wandering around and I said to Alec I think, at the time, "That gen set there..." It was a 30 kVA [1000 Volt Amperes] pretty big diesel powered generator set. "I reckon we can make something of that." Like it turned over and that, I just turned it over. And so we, short and tall, we got it onto a tip truck and got it back to Bien Hoa
- 20:00 and with a bit a fiddling around between old Waxy and myself. Waxy was the mechanic under me. I was the corporal vehicle mechanic and this other chappie, he was an ex World War II bloke actually. But he was the oldest fella in our unit. Long gone now I believe. Anyway, we got this old generator and all it was, there was a bearing bugged in the back a the governor. So we weren't able to get another bearing, ball bearing as such, so I went up to my friend up at 1 Battalion
- 20:30 who they had a little lathe and I got hold of a bit a brass and I turned up a brass bush, and we put it in and that lasted till later on in the story, the old generator come to it's conclusion. But it worked. We set it all up and with the camp we wired it up so that we had 110, 240 and 440 volt right throughout the camp in all the tents. We had electric lights and all sorts of things.
- 21:00 And even at this salvage depot we got, I dunno we did take about 4 front loader automatic washing machines and we made a couple a them work and we had our own washing machines in our laundry and all sorts of things. We had the best set up little camp goin'. And the Yanks used to say, well they said generally to all the Aussies [Australians] how we could make things work where they couldn't, sort a thing.
- 21:30 Cause the, well I think I'm right in sayin', the average Australian is fairly innovative. He can make between a few of you, you can make just about anything work. And well, we were in the situation we had to anyhow.

**And the Yanks would just throw it away and get a new one?**

Yeah. And also their tradesmen are a little bit different or were in those days and I think, we become more like them now. A mechanic in the American army might only fix a gearbox or he might only fix an

- 22:00 engine. A mechanic, an Australian mechanic in those days especially, you could start at the back and go to the front and you could use a milling machine and you could use a lathe. You were more versatile. The average American tradesmen, they were very constricted. Not constricted, probably not the right word, in what they were able to do. They only did what
- 22:30 they were taught to do and that was it and we were able, and I think I'm very right in saying this, the average Aussie he was a bit more innovative. He could make something work that wouldn't look like it was gonna work and in that way we were able to make ourselves a lot more comfortable I s'pose. We reckoned we were comfortable anyhow.

**All an Aussie needs is a bit of fencing wire doesn't he?**

Something like that, yeah.

**How long were you at the**

**23:00 Bien Hoa strip?**

We went to Bien Hoa, we got to Bien Hoa on the 28th of September I think, or that might a been when we got into Vung Tau in '65, and we left they packed us up out of Bien Hoa, I might have the figures a little bit wrong, around about April 1966. And we went back to Vung Tau as a

- 23:30 unit just our unit the 3 Field Troop, and we were sent back to Vung Tau to prepare the area for the further influx of Australian troops. Australia had been, had committed more troops and they were sending out a lot more and they were gonna make their base camp or they ended up making their base camp in Vung Tau, on the
- 24:00 banks of the South China Sea, in amongst what, well by the time we finished it, it wasn't sand dunes. But we went down there and with these 5 bulldozers and things like that we had to set up a main water point and prepare the area so that they could move in. So we used the bulldozers. Bulldozers were working 24 hours around the clock and they flattened all the sand dunes right along the beachfront, flattened it all out and

24:30 prepared the area prior to further Australian troops and all the, well it was called 1 ALSG [Australian Logistic Support Group Base] Australian Logistics Support Force. Made the area ready so that they could land on the beach.

**How long did that take to do?**

We were there I think about 4 weeks,

25:00 something like that. And then they shifted us up as a unit again and sent us up to Nui Dat.

**Before we go to Nui Dat, were you there for the landing of the ALSG [Australian Logistic Support Group Base]?**

Yeah, yeah they were came in in different ways. The [HMAS] Jeparit then was the supply ship. There was the Sydney was still bringing stuff up I think, and plus troops were being flown in and all sorts a things.

25:30 That's well, that's when the other Australians started getting there and all this time we'd had our old faithful generating set and things like that. And we'd, when they started arriving in Vung Tau we as a unit started getting shoved from one, off the top of that sand dune because one a the new mob liked it better and we started getting shoved around, and we were pretty pissed off with all this in the end.

26:00 But anyway, then it really, the icing nearly got taken off the cake. They, some powers to be, that are new chums arrived out from Australia reckoned that we didn't really need our big generator set, they were gonna take the bloody thing off us. So anyway, there was quite a bit of kerfuffle goin' on about this generator set and we were more or less sayin' well, they're not bloody gonna have it. It's ours. Which in some ways is

26:30 not very matey I s'pose, but anyway.

**I think it's a bit rude that they thought they should have it and not you.**

Anyway, it was pretty rugged, it'd done a lot a work. Well we'd had it running for 6 or 7 months. We never switched it off to change, we'd get a drum a oil. Cause petrol and oil to the Yanks them days there was no hassles. Like if we wanted fuel we'd just whistle down an American fuel truck comin' past, "Hey guys, come and fill our tanks up," and things like that. And I'd get a 200 litre

27:00 drum of engine oil and when I reckoned she was getting about due for an oil change, c when we switched this thing off sometimes we couldn't get it goin' again, the starter motor wasn't the best. So I'd just pull the drain plug out and start the oil running in the top and while it's still running just change the oil. Never change any filters or anything. What were they? You just keep changin' oil. But anyway, she'd done a lot a running and it was getting rather 'clangy and bangy' and that, but it was still doin' the job all right.

27:30 But anyway, in the end I'd been into Vung Tau on leave and that and been to the grog shop and things like that, and hitched a ride back out to the camp and came up over the hill I could see this glow in the sky. And what the bloody hell's that? Got up the top of the hill and looked over the top a the hill and here's old Budda as we called our gen set, c it was a Budda Nova diesel engine that drove

28:00 it but there was a sheet a flame about that long coming out of the exhaust pipe on it. Cause it was down in the, in between the sand dunes in the gully. And anyway, I thought, "Geez and she was racing," it was really pickin' up speed and goin' like the clappers. And I thought shit, she's had it and I raced down there to try and stop it but just as I got there I heard it had started. Anyway, it disintegrated itself, it blew itself apart. Now to this day, and I can show you a bit a paper

28:30 there with a comment on it, to this day lot a people believe that one of us or some of us bodgied it up and blew it up deliberately. Now as far as I'm concerned that is not the case. The poor old thing died of old age I s'pose you might say. I think, anyhow this is my story and I'm sticking to it. The bottom radiator hose had,

29:00 they were pretty oil covered and that and it had just, it was had it and it burst letting the water out. And if you let all the water out of a diesel engine while it's still running, the engine gradually gets hotter and hotter, and as it gets hotter it runs faster and faster until it goes into oblivion. Which it flew a piston out the side and was bits a metal goin' everywhere when it went. But I personally don't feel that it was cannibalised or

29:30 bodgied up. Now I have a little note on a piece of paper over there from when the chaps were writing this book of ours, and Captain McGregor, who was our boss made the note on it that, he says that he believes I didn't have anything to do with bloody blowin' the generator up, he reckoned it was Waxy that did it. Waxy bein', well unfortunately poor old Waxy isn't alive anymore anyhow.

30:00 But I don't think Waxy did it anyhow. I think it was just it happened at the right time maybe. But anyway, the hob nobs up top didn't get their big generators. So we dug a hole and we buried her with all due bloody ceremony c we had the equipment to do it, so we just dug a big hole and pushed it in. Cause the thing weighed about 3 tons. Pushed it in a hole and buried it.

**So you held**

30:30 **a formal service?**

Just about, yeah. A couple a beers and wet its head. Yes.

**What was said at the burial?**

I can't remember now but the old Budda as it was known, it had brought us all a lot of well a lot more comforts, like we were able to have lights to read by and things like that. It may sound a little bit funny, we were on the

31:00 perimeter at Bien Hoa airbase, but Bien Hoa airbase was lit up like a Christmas tree anyhow. Like the baddies knew where it was, they didn't, you didn't have to have lights on or off but at night time it wouldn't be advisable to go walking along and silhouetting yourself in front of a straight out light. You might've been a sitting duck if there was someone out there. You stayed, kept it a bit low key. But we didn't go as far as havin' street lights, but all our tents had it in. We had power in the tents you could have your electric shavers and your tape recorders and all these sort of little extra luxuries that the poor old 1 Battalion soldier infanteer livin' in his tent up on the top of the next little hill from us, he didn't have any a that.

**I'm surprised that when you were at Bien Hoa that the Americans didn't give you a power supply?**

No each... Bien Hoa was a maze of little units like ourselves probably, except for the, say the battalions. But most of them were little units and you looked after, in some ways I guess it was pretty, dunno what the word is there.

**Dog eat dog?**

Yeah, more or less. In retrospect I s'pose it would a been a lot better if they'd had a big central power plant. Like obviously

32:30 the airport itself had one like had the power supply but they were all big mobile generators. Anyhow but they would've had power supply to supply the control towers and all this sort a stuff. But yeah, each unit you had to do for yourself, and as I said, we went in there and we had a little 2kVA. Well the 2kVA now you buy 'em to put in a caravan and things like that and they won't run a fridge, they'll only run a bloody light anyhow. So that's about it.

33:00 So we reckoned we had to have something better than that, which we did. We even, well again goin' back to that the salvage yard, we got fridges and got them working from the salvage yard, and as I've said washing machines fridges and that. Well the poor old digger up on 1 Battalion, he was lucky he'd have to wash his bloody clothes himself. We could chuck 'em in a washing machine. Yeah, we had it pretty.

**It sounds very civilised.**

Yeah, we had it set up.

**How long were you supporting the**

33:30 **ALSG at Vung Tau?**

Again some of this is a bit vague. We were only on the beach there for about 4 to 6 weeks I think. The time it took us to clear, level out the dunes and get the water points sort of up and working so that they had some water, and well water is always the

34:00 main thing. You've got to have bloody water wherever you go for a start. And then once they all started moving in then they moved us to Nui Dat and we moved into a rubber plantation and we had to start then preparing the site for the battalions to move into the Nui Dat area which became the main Australian active base in Vietnam.

**Well before you tell us how you prepared that site Rod,**

34:30 **were you driving dozers and stuff when you were levelling out the sand dunes, what was your role?**

I took my turn when I could. I wasn't an operator as they called 'em but I did a few hours shifts on the dozers, yeah. But the main thing was just repairs. Cause when, on the beach there with the dozers we were having a heck of a lot of trouble apparently. I don't know how true it was but I know it was murder on the radiators. The sand

35:00 on the sand dunes had a very high abrasive quality, or higher than some other sands that we've got here I believe. Now how true all this is I don't know, but all I know is it used to sand blast the radiators in the bulldozers. And it didn't matter c the most bulldozers still do you can either turn the fans so that it sucks or it blow. Whether it sucks fresh air in from the front or sucks hot air out, you can turn 'em either way. We

35:30 tried 'em both ways and the sand grains getting caught in the fan and that was sandblasting and just

wearing out the radiators. And there's no way I could repair them. If you got one little leak you might keep it goin' for another few hours. But anyway, to get over this business we, I said to the boss we better get some radiators which we had to do from Australia to send out. So we get this nice big batch a radiators,

36:00 I dunno what we got half a dozen or so or more and like they would a run into big heaps a dollars in those days just these radiators. And they were boxed up by these base wallahs [people who stay on base] in ordnance depot at Moorebank and nicely packed up. They were beaut, separate crates, big ones. I opened the bloody things up and I nearly spewed. They'd used on these boxes they'd used about 4 inch nails to nail 'em together. You can probably

36:30 imagine the mess. The, every one a these radiators I had to sit down and solder 'em up where they'd drove the nails straight through the wood packing on 'em into the bloody radiators. Well, there was quite a kerfuffle over that because I saw red and I got my boss, direct boss straight over and I said, "Have a look at this." And he flipped his lid and he went to his boss the next one. And anyway, it ended up in pretty high ranking,

37:00 everyone was let known about it anyhow. I dunno what happened to the bloke that nailed the box up. He might be still in his own box, I don't know.

**They could a been nails in his own coffin you reckon?**

Yeah, but that was hours and hours of work. I had to sit there and sort of start repairing these radiators before we could even start shifting them over, and we were working our tractors virtually round the clock 24 hours a day and I think they did a pretty good job. They kept goin'.

**And once you've repaired a radiator it's never the same as**

37:30 **new is it?**

No. But it didn't matter much c the life expectancy of those radiators down there on the beach on the sand dunes was measured in hours, it wasn't long. And when you took it out it was like you had be careful handling any edges if you were near any of the fins, they were just like razor blades. But yeah, that sand had a pretty big affect on our tractors and also had a big wear factor

38:00 on the tracks and sprockets and things like that. That was another thing we had to change pretty regularly. Well, a lot more often than they would a been done under normal circumstances. But the sand really chopped 'em to pieces.

**Is the beach sand more course than other soil?**

It didn't appear to be course like as compared to ours here, it didn't appear any courser. Possibly if anything when you looked at it, from my memory now, I would say that it appeared to be finer sand. But they said it just had it was a must a been a harder material

38:30 harder more abrasive than what some of the sand we had here. This is what I was told not bein' a geologist or anything, I don't really know.

**And I s'pose compared to the more clayey soil which you would a found at Nui Dat it would a been more course?**

Yeah, well that was just clay, real clay up there, yeah.

**So how much time did you spend in Vung Tau while you were working at the beach there?**

What do you mean? Like on leave in town and that

**Yeah.**

We could, we just about got in town every day or every night,

39:00 unless you were on, like if you were taking the turn on the tractor or something at night. If you weren't on duty you were allowed into town. If you weren't somehow enrolled in some night work somewhere.

**Whereabouts would you go when you hit town?**

Just the local bars.

**Any popular spots?**

No, nothin' in particular. No, I can't say even in those days I couldn't handle their beer anyhow. Although you could get most of

39:30 'em, you could get black market American beer in the Vietnamese bars but it was just to get away from the camp. You'd go and sit there and probably get sloshed half the time too, which in some ways it was like a little bit silly, probably dangerous. But I dunno, all our blokes, well all our blokes bar one came home. But...

**Were the bars full of girls?**

Yeah, they're

- 40:00 all on the make they... Well on the make in as much as they used to, what'd they used to call it? Tea you had to buy the bar girls tea. This Vietnam tea. No, there was a particular name I just can't think of it now. But they used to charge some, and all it was, was I dunno coloured water or something and they'd charge something and like, apparently the girls got a cut of
- 40:30 how much they, if they were able to, if they could con you into buyin' 3 or 4 of those drinks they got 25% of it or something, I dunno. But they'd charge you the equivalent of, well in those days of a dollar for a bloody drink of something that wouldn't have been worth anything.

**Were you listening to music?**

Yeah, they had some music on. All American stuff that they'd somehow come across. Some a the bars you'd go past if you were walking

- 41:00 past in the streets, they were playing some of their local sort of music which all Asian type music, sound the same to me. It's sort a got a, I dunno what it is, there's something about it, it's I can't really explain it. But once you, if you went into a bar you usually found they had some sort of an old juke box type a thing or something like that playing some of the American records or something that were out.

- 41:30 But.

**So you worked hard and played hard?**

Yeah, booze was the biggest thing I s'pose. I guess I didn't drink a hell of a lot before I went to Vietnam but I think it did teach me to drink or teach me more or something. Although by that time I was one of the old diggers. Like I was 25 years old then. I was old fella.

- 42:00 Some a the kids....

## Tape 5

- 00:31 **Before the break we were just talking about Vung Tau and preparing the site. You mentioned that around this time national servicemen hadn't actually come into the ballgame yet is that right?**

Yeah. I'm just tryin', I just can't remember the exact date now but we my first part or contact with national servicemen I s'pose was when I think it was 5

- 01:00 Battalion came over.

**Is this Nui Dat?**

It must a been Nui Dat but they came ashore I think at Vung Tau, and they what was happening they put the battalions ashore at Vung Tau and they were acclimatised there before they went into an actual war zone I s'pose you'd call it, because Vung Tau was considered reasonably safe. Whereas Nui Dat was an actual war zone or could be easy enough or was,

- 01:30 well that's where Long Tan ended up happening right in there, and things like that so. Yes, it would a been early 1966 when we started getting' the national servicemen in.

**What did you regular army guys think about national service being bought into the war?**

Didn't have any effect I think it was just some more people around to help or something I think. We weren't very

- 02:00 impressed with what was going on back in Australia.

**Were you actually...**

The average soldiers like in the way of protests over people squawking blue murder about coming and things like that, we thought that was pretty piss-weak of them. But that was the general feeling I think right through any of the serving members at the time.

**Were you getting much information about the response that Australia was having to the Vietnam War when you were there?**

Only what we heard on the radio of course,

- 02:30 a bit there but then it was only through Radio America I think it was and things like that. And you'd get odd little snippets and then what we were getting from home whatever letters and things, but there was nowhere near the coverage there is now days or anything like that. But we knew that there was quite a bit of opposition I s'pose was the word to it, which was the same... Well



03:00 Australia followed the American thing too I think, because Americans were squawking blue murder too. Probably going, starting to get that way now a lot like Iraq is today as far as opposition from certain factions and things like that.

**Would it be a topic of discussion amongst you?**

No, I don't think so no we were more interested in how many cans a beer we might be able to get that night. But no, I don't. No, I'd say definitely not.

03:30 I think most of us felt a bit annoyed just that there was people there protesting and things like that and we thought well blow. I think our general thoughts were, I guess I'm only speaking for myself but I think probably for a lot of other blokes we were over there and we were trying to do a job, why shouldn't the other buggers do their turn? And that's probably along the lines we were thinking. But it

04:00 was all a pretty hopeless cause as it turned out, but still at the time we were doin' what we thought was right and so was the government of the day anyhow as far as I'm concerned. And another 40 years they'll be doin' they'll send Team 10 around to interview some a the blokes that were in Iraq this year and things like that. Same thing'll happen I guess.

**Something else that you mentioned before you went to lunch is**

04:30 **Budda the generator. You were actually brought into an official questioning about...**

Yes, I had to, I can't think of... The brigadier I think it was anyway, I had to front up to hierarchy and they sort of alleged that I may have sabotaged the gear that they wanted to have, and well I can't remember the exact words now but I think my

05:00 reaction probably would a been well if that's the way you think that, all I can say is no, we weren't responsible. It was just like I explained to you earlier I think that it just it decided it was time to die and that was it and probably was just a handy time for it to die. But I didn't add that to them at the time.

**Sure. With the work that you were doing at Vung Tau and setting up that area was that pretty much a 24/7**

05:30 **sort of a job?**

Yes certainly. At one stage there, there was one particular, I ended up gettin' charged over it but he let me off in the end but I went 72 hours without sleep one straight stage. Just when we were havin' a bit more trouble with the dozers I think it was or something, I just can't remember why it was so long. But anyway, then when I crashed I did crash out and then next thing I wasn't on parade the next morning

06:00 to answer roll call, and one thing led to another and they found me in me bed still asleep, so I got into a fair bit of trouble. But anyway, that got sorted out but I was out on my feet more or less. But most of the blokes like it was nothing unusual to do even, you know 24 hours or more straight if it came that way. But some a the fellas that had to go out on a, while

06:30 we were building this, trying to get these bases and that ready, there was still segments of our unit who were the actual engineers who still had to go out on patrols with the battalion and do that part of the job, which might've been going as a just supporting engineers for an infantry company or something, to check out some tunnels somewhere or something. Those sort a jobs still had to be done.

07:00 But then when they came back to camp they were still asked to go and maybe hop back on a bulldozer or something like that. So they'd try not to send them out in the bush while they were absolutely bombed out, but when they came back to camp it wasn't so bad if they went to sleep behind the controls of a bulldozer or something maybe. But yes, there was no straight 5 day week and then weekends off or anything like that. It was,

07:30 you could be asked to work big, long, heaps and that was it. You weren't really asked anyhow, you just did it, you knew what had to be done.

**Would it get to you, the exhaustion?**

It probably would. Like I say, I probably kicked up in me own way. I sort a thought I went to sleep and I probably heard 'em callin' everyone out on parade but I probably thought to meself stuff it, I'm gonna go to sleep. And I went back to sleep. But

08:00 and then I got hauled over the coals a bit and got a wrap over the knuckles and something and reprimanded or something at the time, and it was he, the boss understood the situation and that but he still as a commanding officer, he has to do something about it. Where he mightn't like doin' it he's still got a do it I s'pose, and he's got a,

08:30 that's the way the army works too. But there was times there when you're really... When one of your senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] or someone like that saw that you were really getting bombed right out, well they sent you off to a rest and convalescence place for a couple a days. I had 2 weeks off in 12 months. Like, and both down to the rest and

09:00 convalescence centre, which there's a couple a photos in the back a the album and that there. All it is

you just sit around. It was only in Vung Tau but they had their own chalet it was an ex-French chalet thing or whatever you call it, and you'd just sit around and you had got the little Vietnamese girls to do your washing, catch up with a bit a your washing and that. Dunno why you ever bothered with that, I could still smell it 12 months after you'd come home. It had a funny smell. It was just what they used.

09:30 But you'd just sit around and generally do nothing and lie back and relax a little bit. Because even if you're in camp say, well even when we were in, so we didn't get R in C [rest in country] anyhow from Bien Hoa, but once we got up to Nui Dat well different kettle of fish. Even though you're in camp and you're so called not out on a patrol or something, but you're still doing something all the time and you still have to carry out security

10:00 things at night. Like everyone had their turn of guard duty at night and things, and that's every night. Like you never got a straight nights sleep and that's if it was quiet. But course, well when Long Tan happened from Nui Dat we were actually within days of getting on the aeroplane to fly home and we thought all our Christmases had come at once a course when Long Tan erupted. Cause we were being mortared as a camp as well and things like that. I was

10:30 under a, in a trench underneath a big low loader when all that was goin' on, all the mortars were flyin' around.

**I'll get to that in a second but perhaps I should just ask you how you were transferred from Vung Tau to Nui Dat?**

As in how we got up there?

**Yeah.**

And that was again only 50 miles. It's not a lot a distances involved in any of these but some of them are

11:00 on what is called black roads which they were under constant threat of attack by, or could be attacked by Viet Cong or the guerrillas or whatever you want to call 'em. How did we? We went by road. We went in an armed convoy by road and they took us all the way up into this Nui Dat area and then they dropped us off and there's 60 of us and we hadn't ever, we didn't even at that stage have any blinkin' infantry support

11:30 and this is s'posed to be a pretty hot area, and they dropped us in there and we had to start buildin' a camp. And things were a bit scary for a while and we, after a while, though the old nonchalance sets in she'll be right. Nothin'll happen, which it didn't happen. I dunno how but it didn't.

**What were you briefed about the Nui Dat before you actually got there?**

They told engineer-wise what they had to do and then they said be careful and cart ya gun around

12:00 with ya at all times. But it's pretty hard to carry a gun and have a shovel under your arm or trying to build something. Like we were removing rubber trees, and again these I was in support of these as far as, like if a tractor there conked out or something like that well I'd have to go and fix it. So, and we were, well any plant operators or anyone working on 'em you're

12:30 more susceptible to come under attack or more susceptible to attack because of the noise. You can't hear a thing. Someone could be blazin' away at you and until, or if you got hit you wouldn't even know because you wouldn't hear it above the noise of the equipment. And if you're working as a mechanic, if I was workin' on it if I was head down bum up out of the inside of a tractor, old Charlie [Viet Cong] could be sittin' out there havin' a ball for all we knew. So in most cases that was where, in all

13:00 cases like that we were supposed to have sort of infantry support to cover our backs while we were tryin' to do our jobs but that didn't always happen.

**Were you upset the fact that you had this incredible lack of cover?**

No, we were only 24, 25 years old. We were invincible we thought.

**Well what sort of equipment did you take with you from Vung Tau?**

From Vung Tau? Everything that was still going

13:30 because by this time a lot of our stuff was getting worn out and we didn't really have any replacements. But also we knew that within a matter of weeks up there that we'd be joined by more forces from Australia and as 3 Field Troop was joined by 1 Field Squadron, who was and still is their, or 3 Field Troop 1 Field Squadron, that is their parent unit and then

14:00 when they got here a course they had their own workshop when they got there. We, there was instead of just us three like two mechanics and an armourer, we ended up with a workshop of about 25 blokes or something. Something like that.

**Well going back to the time to which you first arrived what was the first job that you had to do as soon as you got to the location of Nui Dat?**

At Nui Dat? Well, I was the,

- 14:30 biggest priority I s'pose was finding a water point and setting up and making a water point. That always, well I was gonna say seems to be but it has to be just about the first priority over and above, well not over and above but on a par with securing your own little area and having somewhere a hole dug or something to go and hide in if things start flyin' around. And I,
- 15:00 because of my knowledge of the water pump and gear like that, in most cases I was, I might go with the party that was sent out just. It'd only be local. We'd have to try and get water in the same area and it's quite a big write up about how they did the water eventually. In the end there we had to, it got pretty complicated. But I s'pose in order of priorities, dig a weapon pit
- 15:30 and somewhere to hide in case somethin' starts flyin' around. Then make your bed or somewhere you can sleep if and when you're gonna get some sleep and then start getting done the jobs that you've been expected to do. Like clearing the area round where they're going to build tents and accommodation and things, for the troops that were coming in.

**So with the water exercise how do you go about finding the effective**

**16:00 water place in Nui Dat?**

Well, it was a matter of finding a source of water. It wasn't, we didn't have boring machines. We didn't go boring for water or runnin' round with fork sticks and divining water or anything like that. Usually, well in one, where was that? That was down at Nui Dat. I was where we ended up putting the first water point at Nui Dat,

- 16:30 it was on a Vietnamese family's little patch plantation and that and they had a well there and we ended up, we just dug it right out but we had to move the family out first. They were done in, they were relocated. I can't go too far into that because I don't really know how they were relocated. I know they were squawkin' blue murder when they were

- 17:00 carted away. That's, I s'pose war you can say. But whether it was right wrong or otherwise, c then soon as they were round the corner we got the two TD-15Bs [International TD15B Dozer] out and within 5 minutes there was nothin' of their house or anything left. We just flattened it because the area had to be secured, well and truly secured around a water point. So yeah, that first water point was based on that well. But

- 17:30 eventually that wasn't enough and then they, how the heck did we do it? I can't even remember now. There's a big write up in the book about it actually.

**When you say you dug out a well do you just start diggin' the ground?**

Yeah, well the water comes up from the bottom and they used that area and put the dozers in and just collapsed the well altogether and just like dug a big hole in the ground. And being, had to be a bit careful about it or you'd cover up the actual part where

- 18:00 the water's coming out. But that was all right for a while but then later on a 'course they had to find more water than that. There was not enough to supply the number of troops that were in the area in the end.

**Would you stick some sort of pumping device in there to?**

Yeah. We only had one little pump to start with but then they got more and more pumps. I think they, our unit or the Australian government commandeered, begged, borrowed, steal stuff that got some off the Yanks, I dunno. But we

- 18:30 only had one little pump. There's a photo of them in those photos there somewhere.

**What as the purity of the water like?**

Well, according to our methods of checking and all that it was OK. Some of it looked pretty yucky before it was actually all treated, when it came out of the ground or when we got it. But let's put it this way, as far as I know we never killed anyone with the water. And some it didn't taste real nice it had a bit of a funny taste. But that's all the

- 19:00 chlorination and things like that that had to be done to it. But it was better to taste a bit off than not taste but be able to kill someone.

**So you just chlorinate it?**

Obviously did the job. Yeah, there was and through different filters and things like that. These pumps had special little filters on 'em, and yeah, I can't... I used to have a certificate to say I was fully conversant with an AB3N water purifying outfit. Now I can't even remember how they worked

- 19:30 or like what to do. But it is a couple a years ago.

**Sure. So after you've set up the water pump site what's the next thing on the plan as far as working your way through clearing?**

Well that... One of the jobs was actually clearing the area to facilitate more personnel putting up tents

and things like that. In some cases our blokes, because we had a little backhoe and things like that,

- 20:00 the little backhoes might dig the original latrines and things like that. Flatten out areas for shower blocks and all that. That's what we did all round that area. Just did it basically so that the other blokes coming in could sort of settle in pretty quickly. If they'd had to do it all themselves they would have been sitting out there for so long and not been able to get in the job that they were initially sent to Vietnam for, was go out
- 20:30 chasing the baddies or something like that. But by the time they got to Nui Dat they would have spent, I think they used to spend about a week on Vung Tau down on the beach sort of getting acclimatised. Because, well I know when we left, when we left Australia first, we left in what was it? Early mid August or something it was still quite cold in Sydney and by the time we got to Vietnam, well
- 21:00 it's tropical you know and it's pretty hard to take. It's not so bad if you go by ship. But any of the blokes coming in by air, it knocks you for a six and you're not quite, it takes you a while to get used to being able to even operate and function properly I reckon, like to be full throttle, there's nothing it... Walking straight out of a cold sort of a place into a tropical place, I don't reckon. It hits you.
- 21:30 But yeah, we were in Nui Dat probably I think another month or might have been a bit less than initially before the rest of the blokes started coming in, and then all the new chums arrived and they started telling us we should be acting like soldiers and that cause we were the old boys and we were forever gettin' told off for standing our gun under a tree or something and doin' what we're doin'.
- 22:00 Some smart young officer fresh out of Duntroon'd come storming along and go butchers hook because you never had, you didn't have your gun under your arm or something in case you were attacked by the enemy. Then you feel like turning around and telling him well you only just got here buddy and we've been here a while, so. But you couldn't tell 'em that too often.

#### **Too often?**

The blokes your same rank you did but it's same again, is we'd been there for a while

- 22:30 and we sort of knew the ropes and when they were like we were when we first walked up the beach at Vung Tau some 9 months before or whatever it had been, and we were scared. We were apprehensive. We didn't know what was gonna happen. They were in the same boat. Everyone coming there was. Although by that time they should've been, should have been more informed because what we were doing
- 23:00 was supposed to have been passed back to Australia and things on different. I know a lot of the engineering stuff was, especially as far as tunnels and things like that. Information was supposed, well was being passed back I suppose because it was being taught at the School of Military Engineering at Ingleburn what our blokes had learnt initially to do with any of that phase of the war in Vietnam.

#### **So you felt like that**

- 23:30 **information that you could've passed on was just not getting passed through the system?**

Well, some of it might have been I think and also I dunno I think that, how do you put it? Some of the very military correct blokes who had never stepped into Vietnam and that until things started happening they thought they knew it all but they

- 24:00 knew nothing and like us we didn't know anything and nor did our officers with us and they admit now that they didn't. But yeah, long as there was some bit of information getting back well it must have helped someone surely. You like to think so anyhow.

#### **What are the difficulties in clearing a rubber plantation?**

I was gonna make a bit of a funny remark about the rubber trees keep bouncing back. But

- 24:30 nothin' all that hard, it just seemed a crying shame. We were just going through and with the dozers and just pushing them out and that and it was someone's living at one stage. They're messy damn things.

#### **Why's that?**

Just the latex stuff. You didn't want to touch any of it because as soon as you touched it you had it all over you. But rubber tree doesn't grow all that big. Not in plantations they don't have 'em all that big. But they just pushed 'em up

- 25:00 and we made roads around the area. But it was a wild place to be making roads because it was a red clay soil and when the other units got there they had they brought with 'em what they called LW16s which were LeTourneau Westinghouse little scrapers. They went along the road and scraped up the dirt and then you drove 'em down the road. But you never had a steerin' wheel, you had
- 25:30 two little buttons. To steer 'em you press buttons. And I was on one one day I'd still, even then used to love to get on something else and drive it if I could, and anyway I run clean off the road and cleaned up half an acre of kazip. All up weight'd be probably with a 16, I dunno 15, 20 tonnes with a scoop full of dirt, and I'm hootin' c you had to drive 'em flat out c they were they had a diesel engine driving electric

motors and if you let the engine revs drop off

26:00 you lost the power. So you lost steering you lost everything and if you sort a panic and lift your foot off the accelerator you lose more power. And anyway I hit the old panic button and then nothin'd work so I went bush and ploughed down a pile a rubber trees. But because also the roads, c every afternoon without fail it rained about 4 o'clock and it bucketed down. Most a the blokes around at around about that time up in Nui Dat you'd take that

26:30 opportunity to just drop all your clothes and grab a cake a soap and have a decent shower. It was the only way you could get a. Cause you were sort of only got a certain amount a water to use normally like yeah, have a good clean quick wash. Sometimes it'd only rain for 10 20 minutes but you might get a couple a inches a rain or something and the place'd be just like a quagmire again and then you'd drive along any a the tracks and they were just like skating rinks,

27:00 and some a these machines are a bit funny to drive and you had some fun with 'em.

**Fun?**

Yeah.

**Well we've got one question about this Latex in the rubber trees did that get stuck in the machinery at all?**

It'd get stuck but it couldn't do much harm like, not on the dozers and things like that. No, not no great damage at all. As far as damage to machines that'd just goes back to the sand was the main thing. That was the biggest killer a them.

27:30 That was down in the Vung Tau area. But no Nui Dat was all right. It, c it was inland as I say the red clay was just messy and there was nowhere near enough water to wash it off if you wanted to wash something off well leave it out in the rain and hope to goodness some of it go off or something. Otherwise just leave it there.

**It sounds like by the end of the day you would a been just covered in this red clay?**

Yeah. Yeah,

28:00 have it all over you. But like typical tropical too by next morning and by lunchtime it'd be dusty sort of thing you know, you go from one extreme to the other and at particular times of the year it'd be more humid than others. All in all, all pretty hot most the time. You never, well I don't think I ever had a jumper or anything like that. If you happened to have the night off

28:30 or something and you went out at night or into town no such thing as a jumper. 'Course, but you still had to wear long pants and a shirt long sleeved shirt preferably or something c the old mossies and things are still a problem. So yeah, you're ducking one thing and gettin' another.

**Was there a malaria problem in the area?**

No, not that I know of but we all you had to have the anti malaria tablets and

29:00 I think we had one a day or something. You just had 'em but I don't think there was any, I don't recollect any malaria problems or anything that way.

**With all the mud that you were experiencing on regular occasions does it cause a big problem with bogging of the machinery?**

Yeah, plenty a that goes on. Even the track vehicles and that, the armoured personnel carriers and things they used to have their fair share of

29:30 coming to grief. Cause a lot of a heck of a lot of Vietnam is very low lying marshy sort of areas all along in the area that the Australians were covering was sort of all along the Mekong River which it's all a big delta and everything's very wet. You still have your mountains and hills as they call 'em and things, but predominately more low

30:00 flat ground I think and subject to getting very boggy and growing rice in and things like that, but then well Nui Dat was probably picked because it was a little bit higher as a base, like it wasn't a marshy boggy area not in itself. The even, I think the rubber plantations they probably selected, well in thinking about it now they always built the

30:30 plantations on a bit of slightly higher bit a ground and that's probably why that piece of ground was selected by whoever to build this camp on because it was a little bit higher and not subject to local flooding.

**So how did you set up your campsite as far as shelter was concerned for yourselves in the early days?**

Well, early days at Nui Dat, again I'll show you some photos we just lived in our hootchies. You crawled in a little thing about this high

31:00 just on the ground until such time as later on we set up our tents. But when we first moved in as a unit just 3 Field Troop we were just living as you would live on a patrol just, but they were sort of permanent set up. Permanent as in much as they were permanent for about a week or a fortnight or whatever it was. But yeah, it was pretty

31:30 simple old stuff.

**Did you have to ship your own rations in, in the early stages?**

They were being brought in I think. I've got to think about that now. I know when we first went up there we were just on ration packs I think for a couple a days but then they started getting some fresh cooked meals in. They might a been flown in from Bien Hoa, I can't recollect but the early first few days or even a week

32:00 I think when we first went in there we were just on the ration packs. Cooking our own on hexamine tablets and things like that.

**What's a hexamine tablet for?**

Hexamine tablet is just a little it's like a little. It's a fuel block a little block of solid metho [methylated spirits] sort a stuff and you had a little stove in each ration pack and you put it in the bottom and put your billy on top and boil your billy or whatever you want to do, each pellet each tablet'd cook a boil a

32:30 cup full of water and cook one tin a beans for you or whatever it was, I forget now. Gee it was pretty grouse stuff.

**In those early days was it depressing to have to you know, to go from something you know that's relatively comfortable to something that's just completely primitive and being forced to deal with the constant elements?**

It was a bit. Cause as I say, like it was like Bien Hoa when they turned around and said righto you're finished here. We knew we

33:00 eventually had to go from Bien Hoa anyhow but when we had to go and dismantle all our you beaut, hot and cold showers and things we had and things we set them up again in Vung Tau when we were there but they were never... I dunno. They'd been pulled to bits and mucked around and they didn't seem to work properly and things like that, and we didn't like leaving Bien Hoa c we sort a knew that we weren't gonna get back what

33:30 we'd built up c we never had the time left to serve in country either. But it is a bit depressing when ya, I s'pose it's when you, even if you sell up your home or something here and go and move there's always a few, not so much doubts but you don't like the idea much or something like that. But I think we were more worried that someone else was gonna get all the stuff that we'd worked so bloody hard to

34:00 get and do, which in some cases they did. We never got some of the gear never reached us that we packed up in Bien Hoa. Whether it ever left Bien Hoa or what happened I don't know. But I think it might a got commandeered some of it along the way. Some of it could a got lost c it was a war area. Like things, everything had to be flown out a Bien Hoa and it was it's wartime and stuff gets lost. Gee you get luggage lost on

34:30 aeroplanes these days when you're goin' somewhere so you can imagine there's aeroplanes just running around like over there, there was planes in the air absolutely all the time and they're like flies up there. You don't even know where half of them are going and they probably don't know themselves either or didn't in those days. It was pretty lackadaisical really.

**Did you get some of your stuff so called commandeered from Vung Tau that didn't arrive at Nui Dat?**

We weren't

35:00 too much worried then c we were nearly ready we were in the last month or so of our serve of our time in Vietnam and I s'pose it mightn't a been the right attitude but we were to the stage where we were lookin' forward to comin' home. We'd sort a had enough.

**During the time that you were in Vietnam what was the mail system like?**

Do you mean delivery wise or do

35:30 you mean was it checked or...?

**Everything.**

Everything? Well all seemed to get there. I dunno how I can't remember now how long it was taking to get there. But what I ended up doing and what a lot a chaps did was you could buy these in country over there you could buy electronic equipment stuff excuse me, that you couldn't buy in Australia. It was mostly Japanese stuff and that

36:00 but it was brought in by the Americans. Cause the American PXs [Postal Exchange - American canteen unit] as they're called. They're their big shops army shops and in those PXs. Like there was a big one on

Bien Hoa airbase a big one in Saigon. Most where there's a big concentration of American forces they always have these PXs and it's like Myers sort a thing. But they've got everything. You can buy anything from whatever you want just about. But especially

36:30 electronic gadgetry and that. So I bought a couple of little tape records and that and sent one home and then I used to make tapes and just send tapes and photos and things home and things like that, and I think that me two little kids at that stage, well they weren't, they were only 4 and 6 or whatever they were and the little bloke, well he didn't know I sent them radios and they all had blinkin' radios I think, all

37:00 families all kids had electronic gadgetry that was bought from the American PXs and things. Cause you could, what a radio that say in Australia you might've had to pay just as a figure, say well when we went over there we were on the change over from pounds to like decimal currency from the old currency. But a radio that say if it cost 10

37:30 pounds here which would be in those days would a been a fair bit to pay for one you'd probably get it for 2 out at the PX and things like that. Cigarettes there I was smoking at the time but I was smokin' Marlboro cigarettes and well when we came, or even in 1970 a packet of Marlboro was about 60 cents I think from memory. Marlboro cigarettes though in '65, '66 there

38:00 I used to get 'em for 10 cents a packet and we used to send a few home. You had to watch it a bit. They didn't worry as much in the early days but later on a lot a that was stopped. But everything was pretty cheap. There was no tax for the forces and things like that and came in pretty. But in the end I got sick on tailor made cigarettes and I wanted tobacco and the Americans don't have any smoking tobacco. Plenty a 'chawin' tobacco'

38:30 if you wanna chew it. But..

**Not quite your style?**

No, I couldn't come at it. I tried a bit gee, I dunno how they do that.

**Were the Americans aware of the fact that you know the Australians were going and getting into the PX places and sending stuff back home?**

Yeah. We were allowed to you know, nothin' stoppin' ya doing. Yeah, nothing, no worries there.

**How often would you get mail?**

39:00 I used to get a letter probably a couple a letters a week or something. One from my wife one now and again from Mum and Dad or something and that was about all I think. But I most times in send 'em some tapes and that to my wife then anyhow. It was no good sendin' Mum and Dad a tape recorder they wouldn't know how to work it. So yeah, just used to drop 'em a line

39:30 now and again let 'em know how it's goin' on. Usually send some photos and I guess as Mums and Dads they were worried about what was goin' on over there, but I don't think in those days it was too far away and no one it, well TV was still, and out in Narrogin in Western Australia TV was still sort of only just coming in and there wouldn't a been a heck of a lot of

40:00 media sort a coverage. Not out in the bush in Western Australia anyhow. It was just coming in but even in Sydney and that well there was a bit a coverage getting back but not to the effect that you see it today. Like they, every, as soon as you turn the news on here now the first thing you're gonna get is how many Yanks got killed in Iraq today or something like that. Well, that was sort of only coming out in dribs and drabs I think and I don't think

40:30 what was happening in Vietnam was really getting back. Either that or people weren't didn't realise what was happening. Not completely I don't think anyhow. I guess they must a had a pretty fair idea c there was a lot a people around from the not too distant past then of the Second World War, and Korea was only just back down the track. But it was, well Vietnam was a different war.

41:00 They all say that. Well it was a different war. I was never, I wasn't in the Second World War or anything but it was different to that.

**Sounds like you had a fairly good mail service though if you were getting a couple of letters a week?**

Yeah, c there was regular flights between Vietnam and Australia. If it wasn't air force planes

41:30 like Hercules most a the time they would be flying urgent cargo and things and also any casualties flew back Hercules most a the time. Our one and only casualty was, I don't know why to this day but we only lost one a the blokes out of our unit. He was suffocated down a tunnel but he's actually buried in Malaya. Now I don't know why they did that but...

00:31 **How secure was Nui Dat while you were there?**

Not very I don't think but I think it was also fortunate that possibly the enemy thought that we were of no consequence. I don't know. This is just a supposition on my part but it seemed to become a lot more dangerous to be around Nui Dat

01:00 in later times after we got there.

**How much later after you got there?**

Probably when the main forces sort of everything got in there it appeared to be people wanting to get into the area 8 10 weeks or something like that. Then a course Long Tan came along in August and it seemed funny but I s'pose it would've happened anyway whether we'd

01:30 been there or not. We, when I say we I mean the Australian contingent in that area I guess the, what is it? 276 whatever they called 'em of the Vietnamese regular forces they were mixed up in the battle of Long Tan it seemed funny that they were down in that area then. So they were possibly sent in to sort out this mob of Aussies or something which they probably

02:00 nearly did. Cause there was a bloody lot of 'em.

**Well what kind of defences were on the perimeter at Nui Dat?**

Only weapon pits and like with manned at all times with machine gun and things like that and also mines. Like they're the, I can't even think what you call 'em now. But when these particular mines go off they blast straight out in front

02:30 and they shoot little ball bearings and all sorts of things. You usually worked electronically from a sighted gun pit or something like that if whoever was on duty saw a whole mob of little chinks comin' over the hill well you'd press the button and hopefully blow most of 'em away. These mines were situated in strategic sort of positions where they hopefully would do the most damage. Otherwise there was

03:00 nothing too much really. Yeah, just the gun pits and the, you knew where your perimeters were. The perimeters weren't really marked as is as like a big wooden fence or anything like that. It was just an unmarked line around the area and each particular section of it was covered by a, there's one,

03:30 certain units responsibility to cover that 500 metres from there to there and they had to make sure that there was someone could see it at all times.

**Was there wire?**

I don't think there was any wire out. Not that I can remember. But there may well have been. If there was I wasn't involved in putting any of it out there. Whether there was wire. No, I don't think so. Although Bien Hoa had certain

04:00 bits of wire around it. So there could a been wire and if certainly there may have been wire put up after we left. Because we were even, it was early days of Nui Dat when our unit left to go home which was August '66 or whatever it was and the camp was only 6 months old then or whatever it was so, and it was still going in, what 1972 or whenever they folded everything up so.

04:30 **What forces were there or had arrived before you left?**

5 and 6 Battalion were in country I think. 1 Battalion went home they were slightly ahead of us. They 1 Battalion I don't from memory now I don't think actually ever moved into the Nui Dat area but I may be wrong there.

05:00 I just can't recollect now whether 1 Battalion moved into the Nui Dat area or whether they were. No it's a bit of a I'm a bit mixed up over those I just can't remember. But 5 and 6 Battalion were in country when we left I think it was.

**Did you observe their operations daily or?**

Up close you mean as in or?

**Just their movements of troops in and out of**

05:30 **the perimeter on patrols and ?**

Well you didn't see too much because it was all surrounded by jungle and that. No you wouldn't you'd if a flight of Iroquois choppers went out or something someone might say that's B Company 5 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] going out to so and so. But that most troop movement probably the biggest percentage of troop movement was done by helicopter. They were air lifted out.

06:00 Not very much by road. I think well helicopters were a dime a dozen over there. I dunno they used a helicopter for everything and vehicles motor vehicles on the road I think the roads, well to go any distance the roads were too dangerous anyhow. There was a good chance you'd get blown up or something like that. Whereas I s'pose you could say the Americans had well and truly had air



supremacy.

06:30 So they were pretty right in a helicopter and they, 'course they had their fighters and then their bombers overhead and things like that. But as far as just physically seeing a whole company or battalion going out on a operation somewhere the only thing you'd hear the helicopters and say, well that's probably so and so heading out somewhere. But it wasn't common knowledge when and naturally where they were going or anything like that

07:00 because I s'pose it was all subject to intelligence from the other side. They'd all be wantin' to know where's goin' whose goin' where. So everything'd probably be kept fairly close to the chest sort a thing.

**Did you ever hear any kind of reports on what had been happening on those patrols when they returned from patrol?**

Yeah, you'd hear if there was any fatalities or whether they'd had any major contacts and things like that.

07:30 It came back through the, especially when we were in Bien Hoa with the battalion briefings our boss would be, have to go to a debriefing and he would learn about it then they'd pass back whatever information they thought the lowly diggers should know I guess. But in most cases yeah, you were kept fairly well informed on what was going on and who'd been where and

08:00 if anyone had got hurt and any worse and things like that.

**I'd just imagine it would've been of interest to you to know what was going on given that your effort was in support of any other effort outside of the perimeter?**

Yeah. Yeah and you usually got a mention. Everything that went out on an operation well even while just with out unit then when more Australian troops arrived well there was a bigger contingent of engineers but usually in all cases

08:30 I would pretty safely say that nearly, well all cases if a battalion went out on an operation they took some of our or some of the engineers with them in case there was tunnels. In most cases as it turned out they found hundreds, later on they found hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of bloody tunnels in Vietnam and the engineers the type of engineers I was attached to

09:00 they were the people that were there to do something about the tunnels, either check them out and or destroy them or whatever they were gonna do with them.

**What was the atmosphere at Nui Dat on the lead up to the Long Tan battle?**

Well there was no difference c we didn't know. First thing we knew about it. Or the what anyone knew about it was when I should remember

09:30 but when that company was actually pinned down by these Viet Cong. But then also when that happened they started mortaring the actual base camp which in Nui Dat and one a the little one a the tents was blown apart just only a matter of metres from where we were and one bloke lost his legs or something and different things. And it was in going

10:00 incoming mortar fire on the night and right through that night and none of us, we all sort of either were stood too as they call it in our weapon pits and that because there was well they thought there was every probability of the whole place being overrun. And well apparently they found out after that it came pretty close to that. Like if that the company, mainly the company that sort a

10:30 got decorated for the Battle of Long Tan if it hadn't been for their actions and what happened there, well there was a damn good chance that we mightn't a been here now. We could a been over run by these other blokes. They might a just come right through us like a packet of salts, I dunno. But they were certainly softening us up for something and it was, well that was the main part of action probably I saw in Vietnam. I

11:00 did see another little bit c I never went out on operations as such because I was a, my job was to do something else. Like they sometimes took a bulldozer with 'em on operation or something but if that had conked out in that situation, if something had gone drastically wrong with that machine out on operation they would've had to leave it there and just scuttle it let it go. But

11:30 that was where probably Long Tan was the closest I came to any sort of action and the only other time was I did get shot at along with 3 or 4 other members of our company. But we were somewhere where we should not have been.

**We'll ask you about that once I've asked you a few more questions about Long Tan. What happened when those mortars landed inside the...?**

12:00 Perimeter?

**Perimeter?**

Everyone pooped 'emselves I reckon was the first sort a thing because at that stage, we could hear the shooting outside but even the blokes in the company that had first been pinned down by the big force of

Viet Cong or whoever they were, they reckoned that they could hear the

- 12:30 concert going on. Cause there was a concert in come and that's where some a those. Some a those entertainers in that photo there I think they were there at the time and we weren't expecting anything, and I don't know whether the powers to be had any inkling till up to the time when it really became full on out in the plantation where Long Tan took place. Well it took place at Long Tan but,
- 13:00 and then when things started hotting up in camp when the mortars started landing and that, well I think we sort a looked around and sort a said to each other well, 'geez this looks a bit fair dinkum.' And I think a few of our comments of the original 3 Field Troop blokes was, "Oh Jesus we're goin' home in a couple a days and we got a cop this." So probably our biggest worry was maybe we weren't gonna
- 13:30 go home. We've done the full stretch and mightn't be able to go home or something, but there was no sort a the day before there was no indication that there was gonna be an attack of that proportion that night or anything like that.

**What were you doing when the attack commenced or when the mortars landed?**

From memory it was sort of late evening when it first started when things started hottin' up in there. I got an idea I just

- 14:00 thought about or I may have just hopped into bed and because I think when the first one landed, c it was so hot and that there we used to sleep with nothin' on or whatever and I just leapt out a me bed and leapt down the weapon pit and I never had a damn thing on. So, but then when thing settled down to a steady roar or something I've jumped up and grabbed, went and grabbed some pants and whatever and put a few clothes on. But
- 14:30 yeah, it was sort of around bedtime. I think from memory around 10 o'clock at night or something like that when it first things started gettin' a bit funny there.

**Where were you asleep when it happened?**

Just in our tent. Little tent alongside the workshop area.

**And what was happening around you when you ran into the weapons pit?**

Everyone was doin' the same thing sort of getting down and out of it as much as they possibly could.

- 15:00 Fair bit of yelling going on from memory. It's all a bit of a blur now but I think everyone thought that it was, well it did come close to a pretty full on blinkin' invasion of our country type a thing, and everyone was fairly worried about it. But 'course we couldn't see anything. All you could see is or you could see the odd tracers and
- 15:30 things flyin' around and you could hear the old mortar bombs landing and you just hoped the next one wasn't gonna land where you were sitting or something like that.

**So how long did you remain in the weapon pit for?**

On and off I think all that night. Yeah, I don't we actually I got an idea we stood down in the morning but yeah, it wasn't too long.

- 16:00 Yeah, it was a bit of a worrying time. As I say it was probably my time in country it was probably the scariest because I hadn't struck that sort of thing before.

**Had you been to the concert?**

Yeah, I had done earlier in the day or something. I think it had been yeah, it's a daytime thing. They didn't have any a these concerts durin' the night for probably obvious reasons.

- 16:30 Noise is your biggest thing. I s'pose daytime I s'pose it didn't make much difference but the baddies would a known we were there anyhow, but if it'd been at night time everything would've had to been illuminated at night and I'm sure the likes of some of those girls or something didn't want to be standing up on the back of a truck in the middle of the night with a spotlight on 'em. Would've been a sort of a snipers bloody daydream wasn't it?

**Well what happened at the concert can you describe it for me?**

- 17:00 It was just an everyday sort of concert I s'pose. It was, concerts were a welcome sort of a change when people came. Like and it was someone from home. I went I saw Bob Hope [entertainer] a couple a times and I dunno why everyone raved about Bob Hope to be quite honest with you but we just went because it was a change and something to do, and that was he
- 17:30 came several times while we were in Bien Hoa actually. But the Aussie concerts were someone from home just even you didn't really know 'em from a bar of soap but it was yeah, something to put you in physical contact just about with home and things like that, and you'd go and listen and some a the blokes I think the

18:00 entertainers used egg 'em on a bit. Get 'em up on the stage and let 'em join in a bit and that and some of the blokes used to love gettin' up there. It might a been their night off they were probably half full of turps anyway so who knows. But yeah, just the music because the only music you got there otherwise was with our little transistor radios and you'd get Good Morning Vietnam from American radio.

18:30 I did have a fairly high frequency or pretty flash sort of a radio thing and I was able get Radio Australia some of the time. But yeah, it was just a welcome change to be able to listen to someone that you knew only just came from Australia or something like that.

**So you don't remember the performances?**

Nothing in particular, no.

19:00 I know Little Patty [entertainer] was there and I think she came over a couple a times or something and I can't even remember half of 'em or many of 'em that came over there. Too long ago. It might be some of this Alzheimer's disease or something setting in, I don't know.

**So did you enjoy a few beers at the concert?**

Oh yeah. Yeah, a few beers any chance you got was the way to go. 'Course you could get cans of beer were a maximum

19:30 of 10 cents each and that and it was a means of letting off steam I s'pose but, and it was always so blasted hot or steamy and that and if you could keep some beers on ice or had some means of keepin' 'em cold it was, gee it was such a relief the end of the day and things like that, or when it became available. But 'course if you were on duty that night or something rostered for a duty that night or something, well you had

20:00 to stay away from it. Not gonna be much help to anyone if you go out there and you're half full a grog.

**You mentioned there was another incident where you were somewhere you shouldn't have been. What happened in that incident Rod?**

Yeah, well this was going back to the time when we were still in Bien Hoa but the boss had asked me if I wanted to come on a reconnaissance flight with them. They had to go up into country further I don't know, we flew in anyhow in a Hercules.

20:30 The commanding officer of our troop and Sandy McGregor, his batman, one sergeant, myself and two other blokes. I think that was it. Mightn't a been quite that many people. Anyway, he'd had to go in to check out an area and it possibly needed a bridge put over it and things which was part of our job as an engineer unit,

21:00 and anyway he asked me if I wanted to come for a job and I thought this sounds like good fun you know, she'll be right. So we hopped in this Herc and took his long wheel based Land Rover with us and drove onto the Herc and they flew us into little strip about. Cause those things can land on a penny 'apenny bit and you're lookin' down from way up and you see this little patch like this, and this bloody great aeroplane gonna land on that. So in you go, and whoop,

21:30 and left the strip in the Land Rover and went to the area we're to be checking out which was s'posed to be like it wasn't a cleared area or anything. There was baddies around and we're havin' a bit of a bo-peep and he saw what he wanted to see and then we saw this old...

**What did he want to see?**

Well, just the area over this river or creek bed or something that may have had to have been bridged so that he could work out what equipment he would have to get up there to facilitate

22:00 making a bridge or whatever had to have been. I wasn't sort of up with exactly what he was doin' I was just along for the joy ride more or less. But then we sighted an old Willys 4-wheel drive jeep thing and anyway, short and tall of the lot of it we had a short mongie [Unimog - truck] and reckoned well blow it, we can have that. But first of all we had to go and clear it make sure it wasn't booby trapped and then

22:30 he got me to just check it out to see if it was a goer or not if we could make it go and everything looked like. It wouldn't start there and then so I said, "Yeah, I think it'll be all right." She'll be right if we can get her back to camp and get her going. And we cleared it made sure it wasn't mined. Then we towed it onto the road and then the big thing was how we were going to get it back to Bien Hoa which was about 80 miles by road. And they were all black roads and we weren't supposed to be on it. And Mac said, "We'll go back out the

23:00 strip. There must be another Yank Herc ready to go back to Bien Hoa." Cause like I say aeroplanes flew around like little taxis everywhere there. So went up and Mac went and asked the officer in charge of this Herc that was there he said, "Can we hitch a ride back to Bien Hoa with ya?" And anyway he wouldn't take us. Or he wouldn't take the vehicle. Never had anything on there either. So anyway we had another short thing, what'll we do? We want this vehicle we'll take a punt and we'll drive back.

23:30 And 'course you weren't s'posed to move on those roads unless you had a full armed escort you know the whole works with bloody big machine guns. So in our wisdom between the five of us or whatever it

was, we decided to drive back didn't we. So and we had to tow, we were towing, I was driving this ungo-able old Willys being towed by Mac was driving the Land Rover and he had his bloke like the roof was

- 24:00 down in the Land Rover and we had one machine gun up front and he had another bloke in the back a the Land Rover, and I had a bloke with me with a light machine gun in the Willys. And that was us and we away we went. And thunderin' down the blinkin' road and all of a sudden couldn't sort a hear much cause the vehicles makin' a fair noise and that but next thing Mac just took to the bush and I'm on the end of a bloody tow rope and I didn't know what was. I couldn't even see, and anyway we've been shot at and there was bloody
- 24:30 bullets flickin' everywhere so he just drove sort of to the edge of the road and sort of bailed out. Left the Land Rover and so we followed suit and we bailed out. Lucky none of us were hurt sort a just cause the vehicles were still moving. And anyway we're lying in this gutter and there's blinkin' we could hear it then there was a machine gun they bloody bullets we were down in the thing and the bullets you could hear 'em goin' over the top. And the as it turned out after
- 25:00 quite a pretty hair raising bloody bout, an hour or something, we finally got them we worked out that the people shooting at us were South Vietnamese, like goodies on our side and we weren't too sure why they were firing on us except that we were on a road that we should not have been on and as it turned out they knew the vehicle that I was drivin' that was bein' towed did belong to a North
- 25:30 Vietnamese or Viet Cong bloody leader and they thought it was him tryin' to make a skip and so they were gonna get him. But they could only sort a see the vehicle that I was in, the old Willys and as it turned out it was a ex-Viet Cong sort of a vehicle. So anyway finally we got a message to them well what ended up happening was we left a sort of a, we made with stones a message on the ground just 'US',
- 26:00 it was too hard to put Australian so we put 'US' for United States in rocks and there was recce flights up above and apparently they saw it and radioed and got the message through to these blokes that the people they were shootin' at were on their side sort a thing. So eventually we got ourselves out of there but probably lucky we didn't, well probably lucky we weren't all killed and by our own side but none a them could speak English of course so we couldn't make ourselves
- 26:30 understood. We were wavin' plenty a white flags and things but we knew who they were but we just couldn't get a message across to them. But it worked out all right in the end, and the old 'Uc da loi' [Vietnamese for 'Australians'] ended we painted it army green and called it 'Uc da loi' which is Uc da loi, which is Vietnamese for Australian. And that we had that old vehicle I dunno we found it probably in about our 4th or 5th month in Vietnam so
- 27:00 and it was still there when we left. I dunno who ended up getting it. Used to use it for our booze trips into the base at Bien Hoa and all sorts of things. I rolled it over one night tangled up all the bloody, c all the communications on Bien Hoa airport were all just phone lines on top a the ground. Millions of 'em and I ran off the road one night and bloody got tangled up in the tail shaft and I must a wound up blinkin' how many hundred kilometres of these wires and the
- 27:30 Yanks are looking for the fools that buggered up all the phone lines.

**What was your excuse for tipping it over?**

I was, had a few too many.

**Had a good night had you?**

Yeah, we used to frequent the sergeants' mess over on the Yank [American] base c they didn't know any difference who you'd put a bit a something on your arm and they couldn't work out whether you were a sergeant or what. So used to go and at Bien Hoa airbase we had a

- 28:00 quite a lot a fun on there. Anyway that's digressing a little bit.

**No I would like to sort a hear what kind of mischief you might've got up to in the sergeants' mess.**

Not so much mischief it was again it was a change it was something else to do and it and anything sometimes to get out of the I s'pose, the pressure of being constantly on duty sort of and waitin' for someone to pull the trigger. There probably wasn't much

- 28:30 different c Bien Hoa airbase in itself wasn't very secure because you had Vietnamese walkin' round. Vietnamese workers on the airbase and you don't know they don't wear wander around wearin' goodies and baddies on their backs or anything like that. Like you dunno whose for ya and whose against. And this was one a the, well one a the first main problems of the Vietnam War I s'pose, and probably is today in all wars now. Like
- 29:00 in wars gone past most of 'em most of the participants walked around with a uniform of some sort on. But now days its changing a bit and it's specially in the Middle East and that the there's blokes carrying guns or not carrying guns who probably are carrying something that can probably make a mess of ya and you wouldn't have a clue who they are. And this is where it first started in Vietnam I s'pose. They knew who we were c we were walkin' around with blinking,

29:30 you might as well say a big Australia on our back, or in the Americans case we're US, but they don't walk around sayin' we're North Vietnamese, we're South Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese had a uniform too but the civilian Vietnamese they both looked the same.

**What kind of atmosphere did that create when you were on leave?**

Didn't take much notice of 'em. Actually I, if you're on

30:00 leave if you're in town or something you would just, well you usually headed for a bar and probably too quick you ended up drinking too much and it wasn't much good and the Barmy Bar as we used to call it, was a local beer stuff it was claimed that someone the Yanks or someone did some tests and the alcoholic content of a blinkin', the,

30:30 a lot a the local beer varied anything from no alcohol to about 30% or something but it all tasted the same initially. So sometimes you'd go out and you might have a couple of their local beer which I didn't drink too often anyhow, but you might have 1 or 2 and you'd be flat on your neck or you'd have a dozen or more and you wouldn't even feel any different so. But it was all bottled. There was no draught and it was just bottled stuff. But they reckoned,

31:00 well even the water was pretty sus [suspect] in a lot of it.

**What about drugs?**

Well a lot a people have asked me that. In my time in Vietnam I must a been naïve or something but I reckon all the blokes in our unit too, I never saw or heard of anything. Not even a smoke of anything like that. Just nothing. It was only a couple of years after we came home

31:30 that we heard that a lot a the soldiers coming home were being stripped searched even coming through Sydney airport and things like that. But when we came home even at that stage I don't think drugs were a problem. I don't think in 1965 and '66 I don't think drugs were a problem.

32:00 Not to my knowledge anyhow. We stepped off the plane at Mascot airport and all we just had people tellin' us to go on, get goin', get goin'. Like no one wanted to see us. In those days like Vietnam was it was happening but no one wanted to know about it. But we weren't searched. I could a brought in anything I wanted to at that stage but it wasn't long after that that

32:30 Customs started getting right on it cause there was all sorts of stuff coming in I believe, and not only like in the first things that were coming in were guns hand guns mainly I believe. But drug-wise to my knowledge, no it wasn't. If it was on it wasn't very big, and well I'm blowed if I ever came into contact with any of it

33:00 and I was still pretty naïve, even I guess I'm still pretty naïve. I have seen a bush of it growin' now but I've never had a smoke of it. I can honestly say that and I wouldn't have a clue what it's all about. I have been into a, in the bar of a hotel and I said to someone, "Jesus what's that bloody stink?" And I was informed that that's what it was. And that's as close as I've ever got to it.

33:30 **What about Yanks do you know if they were using drugs when you were up there?**

Again I don't really know. I would suggest that it might have been may have well been on. But we didn't sort a get, well I can say anyhow that I didn't get all that close to very many Americans. The one I did mention earlier in the interview the big dark fella that played the ukulele

34:00 I got quite friendly with him on a talking point of view more than anything else and we just spoke about home and things like that, but I can't say I really got to know any Americans where he'd turn around and offer me a weed or something like that or whatever they offer ya. But it's could well a been, well I've read since that drugs were... Well they had to a been I s'pose around in those days

34:30 like in Vietnam but I think it was probably in it's infancy in country and in the forces but apparently now it must be a pretty big thing. Just see few lot a people in Darwin have got collared over it but I guess this is modern society as it changes, as we go along.

**Well we've covered drugs and alcohol I guess we have to cover sex.**

35:00 **What about prostitution up there?**

Well there's plenty of it goin' on I think. I only ever partook once and I had such a guilty conscious I give it a miss. But all the bars and that that you visited soon as you walked in you'd have a 1 or 2 at least, birds come and they'd come and sit on ya knee you know and you'd sit up the bar and order a beer and the next thing there'd be this lovely lookin' lady sitting on your knee.

35:30 But you had to be pretty firm and just tell 'em to get out, PO [piss off], or whatever the best way. Cause most of 'em, a lot of 'em couldn't speak English. A lot more of 'em probably weren't any more than 13, 14, 15 anyhow. Not that seemed to make. It didn't make much difference to them and probably didn't make a lot a difference to a lot a the blokes either. But I dunno I,

36:00 maybe I was too young and innocent or something. I don't know. But our first trip to Saigon there was

only a few of us just mixed up in a bar and this bird got hold a me and then I didn't think much of it in the end. I can still smell her today and it to me it didn't, it wasn't very nice so that was as far as it went. I did get to know,

36:30 I did get to know another girl who was a French Eurasian that was in Vung Tau, and we used to quite often, I think she was married or anything, something like that anyhow. She could hardly speak English anyhow, but I used to go into this bar now and again and just if she was there we'd probably sit down and just talk but never went any further than that. But it was just talking to a female I s'pose and,

37:00 but even not being able to talk, I s'pose I could tell her anything and she could probably be telling me anything just about. About all she could say was, "Good day Aussie," or something like that and that's about as far as her vocabulary went. But there was plenty of it around I think. Well there was. But then a 'course we were all warned of the pitfalls you could fall into and even to the point of gettin' the old fella chopped off with razor blades if you weren't, if they were. They reckoned that

37:30 they were settin' 'em up with blinkin' razor blades or something and that was a bit scary. Sort of reckoned it was probably better to go and hide around the corner and have some man made stuff or something like that. But I certainly didn't want to go home as a medical evacuee with a big dose of something or other.

**Was there a lot of venereal disease amongst the troops over there?**

Well I believe there was. Not the troops.

38:00 **Well maybe amongst...**

Well I dunno.

**Your unit, did anyone come down with venereal disease?**

Yeah, I never knew of or knew anyone that actually contracted any disease of any sort. We were all preached that it was there every corner you turned around there's probably a fairly good chance it was. I don't know. The way, and again though sometime you've got to wonder, but the way some a these blokes used to talk and carry on well you'd think that they must've caught up with every girl on the

38:30 street in Saigon type of thing. But as far as I know they never had anything wrong with them. So if venereal disease was so prevalent as we were told it was I would've thought that we would've seen more evidence of it with blokes bein', gettin' pretty sick or something like that. But yes, it had to be out there because there must've been plenty of sexual activity around the place.

39:00 But a lot of it was only kids really little kids. Little boys'd come along and try and sell you their sister who was that high, and I dunno I maybe I was had too strict of an upbringing or something like that but I think probably a lot a the blokes they did have a few morals or something like that.

**Did you witness any difference in the morals between Aussies and Yanks?**

39:30 I don't think so, not really. Not when you boil it all down. The at the time in '65-'66 probably more so than later on but I think it also happened a lot later on you've got to also take into account not that it should make any difference. But I forget the percentage now but I think it was about 85% of American forces in Vietnam were black.

40:00 I believe it was somewhere in that vicinity. Like all their conscripts or whatever, they conscripted the poor old black fella and they sent him to Vietnam. He was cannon fodder and that was happening and I can quite believe by the number like there was very few white blokes specially down in the lower ranks. When you get to the officers there was quite a few more white blokes, but

40:30 the lower ranks were predominately black. Whether the American Negro has, well I believe he has a lot different or a lot higher sexual drive than the, I s'pose is the right way of putting it, than a white male, whether that's right or not I dunno. But I believe it is. So, but I dunno,

41:00 I don't think they're all that much different to what any red blooded American Australian male is. Who knows?

## Tape 7

00:31 I dunno whether boredom's the right word sort a thinking about it now. If I mentioned that I did something because I was bored it's probably a bit of a silly way of thinking of it because you didn't have much time to get bored at any one thing because you were doin' something different all the time. But that was probably part of the spice of it something,

01:00 and you made it that way. Just something do something different all the time. That makes life pass along I guess, but then you're wishing your life away. So what's the worst?

**The thing is like with from what I can gather from your job it is quite repetitive you know on a**

**daily basis so any sort of break away from that?**

Yeah, break up the day a bit and make

01:30 it a bit different most times. Well at Bien Hoa I spent blinkin', I s'pose 5 weeks with the boys scrounging the materials and that and building the workshop and things like that with pretty primitive gear as it turns out, like that we had to work with, and the gear would've been appropriated off the docks in Saigon or something, and it'd be American gear and that

02:00 you'd just go and help yourself and talk your way out a the main gate or something like that. That's how we acquired most of our stuff.

**So you'd actually be liberating...?**

Yeah. Oh yeah. Was the only way you could have anything because well there was no way the Australian government were gonna give it to ya. But after we'd been like at Bien Hoa there for only a matter of days and then when the dozers'd [bull dozers] break

02:30 down or something or if I had to do a fair bit a work on a dozer I said to Mac, "Well how can we get up there?" And be lying down or trying to get into the very bowels of this machine and the things so red hot like it's hot from being just working if they were able to get it back to the workshop, and again the sun's that hot everything's, and you can't touch anything. I said we've got to have a bit of cover, overhead cover that's all we wanted was shade which we ended up building. But, and it,

03:00 well now days wherever they go probably a mobile as far as a in a workshop environment the first thing they put up in most countries that Australia will get mixed up in any wartime conflict now is subject to big heaps a sunlight and gettin' pretty hot in most cases when you think about it, and all the equipment that you work on is all metal and metal gets awful bloody hot so you want to be able to cover it up

03:30 a bit so you can get near it.

**I'm just surprised that you weren't given anything that could be used as a structure to cover up?**

No. The closest we got was tents, 4 man tents and that was it. And these machines and had to fix 'em, but yeah that was part a the challenge and we overcame it.

**Where would you mostly go scavenging for these extra pieces of equipment?**

Any gear we wanted like corrugated iron and things?

04:00 **Yeah.**

Down to the docks at Saigon and the Yanks had gear there was that much gear lying around you couldn't drive over it or fly over it with a C130 Hercules and you just went in. And well one bloke used a bit a dunny paper one day or something, a bloke asked him if he had a docket for that and he waved it out the door of his truck and kept goin' and he had the fork lift on the back a the truck that he'd loaded the bloody truck up with as well. So and brought the fork lift

04:30 back and after got the gear unloaded off it Mac said, "You better take that bloody fork lift back, we don't really want the screws up here lookin' for us." So yeah, but all our buildings and that were basically American. Yeah, there was nothing. The only building that came from Australia was our illegal boozier in Bien Hoa which was s'posed to be the kitchen. That was the only solid,

05:00 oh no, they sent us two a those. There was two solid structures that we got that the Australian government sent up and they were allotted to our unit. One was our, which we made into our canteen and the other one was the Q [Quartermaster] store. It was a store to put which was used as a Q store to stack any all the gear and well the clothing and stuff like that. But otherwise, well we had from Australian sources was tents. I can't think of anything much

05:30 else and the equipment we had like the working equipment trucks and things.

**As the whole unit behind building this bar?**

The one thing I gave old Alec McGregor as a commanding officer he was pretty strict and in his own words he was an arrogant prick but he did something like that come up he'd call the whole unit together and get a sort of a vote of one way or another or

06:00 what we want to do and that's how it was done. I s'pose you might say he did it democratically, is that right in thinking that?

**So you put it to a vote whether or not everybody wanted?**

Yeah, like we as a unit were asked, "Do you want a nice tin shed to sit down and eat your dinner in, or will you do with what we've got?" Which was a tent and well he just put the question to us and we'll use this other shed and we'll make a nice comfortable

06:30 recreation area I think it was called for a start. Well it was a recreation area we just had a bar and some

poker machines and a juke box and whatever and it was quite good.

**You said that you actually made a bit a money out a this?**

Yeah, well I think I did mention the beer. Virtually most of our beer supplies we got for nothing because they were cast out broken cartons that the Yanks sort a didn't want anything to do with so some a the boys worked out where they could get these, they were comin' back

07:00 with 'em anyhow but no one ended up in jail, so. But then we sold the cans a beer well 10 cents a can I think our beer was but there was lots a beer drunk and things like that and the pokies used to turn a bit of a profit too.

**Well that's what I was gonna ask you how much were you slotting into the pokies per...?**

I forget what they were 5-center or something I think. I just can't remember off hand. But they were only 5 or 10-centers but still 5 or 10 cents then was probably it was a fair bit a money in

07:30 '65. But yeah, they turned up the odd jackpots but like all pokies they made more money than they and the Yanks were the ones that liked it. They used to come over from next door and play. We were takin' more money off them than we were takin' off ourselves. Most of our blokes probably didn't play the pokies all that much. Every know and again. I used to go and have a bit of a splurge now and again but just limit meself to you know 5 or 10 dollars or whatever it might a been and that was it. But with the

08:00 proceeds of the canteen money we were able to buy things that we couldn't get or pinch or otherwise acquire or something from other sources, we could go into town and. Well at one stage we couldn't get hold of light fittings and things like that so we could wire up these, have these things so we went and bought them. And different little things. Might a been something like some taps for the showers or something but we'd just go and buy 'em if we didn't out of canteen

08:30 funds. No one was out a pocket. In the end when we packed up from Bien Hoa we had some money left. I forget what they did with it now. I know it was it became a bit of a quandary. They didn't know what they were gonna do. I dunno a thousand odd bucks or something which a thousand dollars was a fair bit a money. But I just can't remember what we did with it. It was put to some good use obviously somewhere. Probably had a smash up party I'd imagine.

**When you say you'd you know go and buy some**

09:00 **taps or whatever, would you actually have to get permission from the CO [Commanding Officer] to go and do that with the canteen money?**

Yeah, like the money went through he knew what was goin' on but well it usually come from him. Like well as the RAEME bloke around the place or one a the RAEME blokes like we were the people that wired up the place for electricity and made most a the showers and hot water systems and things like that. Like we had a bit more time to spare. We weren't going out on patrols like

09:30 some a the other blokes. So then if we got to the stage where say we wanted a tap for that to make it a bit easier to use and that we'd just say to the skipper hey we need this we need that. Yeah righto, and through him and the staff sergeant I think, or whoever it was, they sort of they had control over the money and that and they'd just either go and buy it or tell us to go and get it and that was it. It was done.

**Sounds like you had pretty much a free range in**

10:00 **that time?**

Yeah, yep.

**How bout the other blokes did you get on with them well?**

In our unit? Yeah. One a the blokes that I like I mentioned before I only it was about 24 hours or something from the time I got posted or knew I was goin' into 3 Field Troop and we hopped on the Sydney to come to, and I didn't know any of them when I went there. A lot a them knew odd one or other

10:30 they'd run in, c they all belonged to the same corps of engineers but I didn't know anyone when I first went there. But then I got quite pally with Bob Bowtell who was the section commander. Well Bob was the one and only bloke who was killed and he was suffocated and that came as a bit of a shock when they came back and said he'd been skittled and, c you don't even, though we were there and we were in

11:00 a war area I s'pose you'd call it. It was a war place I felt that well it can't happen to me. I'm all right. It's not gonna happen to me. And I think it was even blinkin' when those blokes were shootin' over the top of us, well they were tryin' to get at us but they couldn't c we were out of the way. But I, they tell me that you know

11:30 if you're gonna get it anyhow. And I knew I wasn't gonna get it then anyhow. So, and I'm still here.

**Did you have some sort of a service for the mate that you lost?**



Just, yeah from memory just one like the boss Alec McGregor like he being the commanding officer yeah, just a small simple service. The body wasn't there a 'course, it had already, that was taken out a country pretty well straight

- 12:00 away I think. Well ya got a do something pretty quickly in those situations. But yeah, they had a parade sort a thing, called a parade and there was a, to honour Bob. Yeah, left a wife and two little kids.

**Were you in a minority being a guy being over there with kids and a family?**

No, not really, like as

- 12:30 we were all regular army we'd all been round a while. I was one a the older ones except for, you heard me mention Waxy before. I don't even know what his Christian names were now, I can't remember, and I don't think he didn't ever want anyone to know I don't think. But Waxy was an ex-World War II, ex-Korean bloke. He was an old codger. Apparently he'd down-graded his age early in the bit. Like he'd joined the army as a little kid.

- 13:00 But he was older than what it even showed on his papers. Well it had to be if he'd joined up when he was he lied about his age and things. Anyway I reckoned he was he must a been 40, 45 or something when we went over there which that's old for regular army in those days. Well even now some a the base camps and that a got if you get up to 45 you're just about,

- 13:30 you've served all your time unless you're an officer or something like that you might a gone further. But except for Waxy, oh Laurie Hodge, he was a bit of an old stager too, but when I bring up these names I know, even looking in that book from which was printed 10 years ago, most a the names I mentioning now they just mark 'em in the book as they've all deceased. So they've all died, probably of old age. But well, yeah '93, what's that? 30 years on from when it happened

- 14:00 when I was serving with 'em. So it'd make 'em 70 odd or something then, I s'pose. And well, both the blokes I mentioned there they used to love the odd drop a booze and cigarettes and everything that went along with it, so probably didn't help their own case much. But no, there was quite a lot of us had kids. Alec McGregor he had at that stage, he had three daughters who, his three daughters are dead now too.

- 14:30 His three daughters were killed by some maniac in Sydney in their own home in 1986.

**My God that's a tragedy.**

Yeah. He's married, well he was married again before that happened. But he's got another I think, he's got 3 more kids from his second marriage. But that's beside the point a little bit.

**Would you talk about your families a lot?**

I think so.

- 15:00 Like I used to have these tapes and that the kids'd be on the tape sayin' like little Dennis he couldn't speak properly anyhow, but usually Marlene'd get 'em to try and say something on the tape and that and usually I'd put 'em on and young... Waxy never had any family even though he was older. I dunno he's a bit of a, yeah the more I think about it, a bit of a stranger really. As far as I could work out he was never married or anything like that, but who knows? I don't know, he was

- 15:30 a funny old bloke and yet no one knew anything much about him. But Carl, the other little RAEME bloke he had a couple a kids yeah, Alec had 3 kids. Yeah, I s'pose 75% of the blokes in our unit had family. But then later on there was a lot of national servicemen and that and most a them, well you're looking at only 19, 20 years old then and not all people get married as young,

- 16:00 well I was blinkin' 18 when I got married. But anyhow, that's beside the point. Not everyone is silly enough to go and do something like that.

**So you'd share...**

Yeah, you'd just talk about your kids a bit and things.

**And play each other your reel to reel tapes?**

Yeah, if yeah or what's if something of interest came up you might play a bit of it back. You mightn't play it all back. There might be some in there that you didn't want to play back to people. But

- 16:30 yeah, generally we were a pretty close knit unit really and there was some hell of some nice guys. We had 3 Aboriginals in our unit and they were the best blackfellas you ever put breath into.

**What made them so great?**

Cause they were in our unit I guess. Mad as hatters the whole lot of 'em. But...

**Did you share the same sense of humour?**

Yeah, think so, yeah.

**So no cultural differences there?**

No,

17:00 nothing. I don't think it'd, it possibly wouldn't work today.

**Why's that?**

I dunno. I think it's changed. I think unfortunately it's the white man's fault that the Australian Aboriginal is where he is today anyhow, but now the, I think the biggest problem is bureaucrats, is making the Aboriginals of today no good. I wouldn't give ya 2 bob

17:30 for any of 'em now specially when you've got the likes of Mr Clarke and a few of them. But anyway.

**Just with these Aboriginal blokes that you had, did they come up through the ranks the same as yourself?**

Yeah. One was a lance corporal I think when we went over there. But we had a, there was David Cook he was a straight, real, Australian Aboriginal. Then Billy Umniopa he was a Thursday Island, no

18:00 Bill. No, Billy Coolabah we used to call him Kookaburra Billy, Kookaburra was a Thursday Islander and Bill Umniopa, I dunno he came from up Cape York somewhere I think. But then Billy Coolaburra who was as black, as black as your hat, he was very friendly with Snowy Wilson who, Snowy was aptly named. He was

18:30 almost albino. And anyway, they ended up getting introduced to, I can show you a bit of it an excerpt from that book there, they were introduced to the prime minister of Australia at that time because they put 'emself off as twins. One was as black as, black as your hat and the other ones just almost albino white and they were as thick as thieves and they were built much the same. Both fairly big built fellas. And they used to have some fun specially with the poor old Yanks and things.

**Yeah? What did they used to**

19:00 **do?**

Just bulldust. We used to, I dunno everyone used to take the Yanks off a bit I think. Like we had 'em convinced that blinkin' kangaroos delivered newspapers in Sydney, a lot of 'em.

**What?**

Well we used to keep all these bloody stories goin' and... But a lot a the lower ranks of the Americans we found anyhow, were very gullible and 'course the old Aussie finds out something like that he'll go to great lengths to have a bit a fun.

19:30 But yeah, they were pretty harmless.

**So they wouldn't even know that you were having 'em on?**

No, no. We had quite a few of 'em convinced that the yeah, papers were delivered in Sydney by kangaroos. But yeah, the Aboriginal boys we had they were, and I think the three of 'em went on to serve pretty well till the, as long as they could. But yeah, they were good blokes. Dave, well there's still a bit of controversy.

20:00 Again that's something that's bought up in those writings there again. David ended up shootin' one of his toes off and a lot a the story was that. Cause he had a pair of guns. Cause over there we had I had me own private little gun. I had a .38 Smith and Wesson Police Special and that, we just, you could go and get hold of hand guns and that like for a couple a bucks, or a slouch hat or whatever you wanted, and most a the blokes had a personal one they just kept

20:30 and used to take it on leave with you or something like that. Tuck it in your pocket. But David, he had a bit of a fad for the old six gun type a things and he had a pair a holsters and six guns, he used to practice his six draw. But anyway next thing he's in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and he'd blown his bloody toe off. I never saw what happened. Some of 'em reckoned he shot it off while he was doin' his quick draw. Someone else said he'd blinkin had an AD, which is an accidental discharge, in his tent with his gun and shot his toe off. Anyway he got a trip back to

21:00 Australia. I think he came back and then he came back out again later.

**So all these blokes running around with their personal weapons was that just a bit of a manly thing or was it really for security?**

I think it was c it was so easy to do it. A lot a the blokes in early days had them had some sort of a gun of some sort. I dunno, I took mine on leave on an overnight, like overnight

21:30 or night leave with me once and I found it a damn nuisance anyhow, c they're heavy a hand gun. I dunno whether you've ever had any but if you've just got a, c we used to go out in just civvies and that and if you've got a .38 Smith and Wesson like I had. It's a little short barrel like the police. They call 'em the police special, they don't use 'em anymore but the damn thing weighs about blinkin', fully loaded about 5 or 6 pounds or something. If you've got that swingin' round in your pocket it's not very comfortable.

It's a bloody pain in the neck.

22:00 So yeah, they weren't such a good idea I don't think. But the in thing was to have a gun of some sort and I did even think at the time I was nearly gonna bring mine home with me then I thought no what do I want it for? And I'm glad I didn't but a lot a the blokes did bring guns home. But that's when I think things started possibly goin' wrong too in that bought the wrath of the customs down on people because there was a bit too much stuff coming

22:30 in that shouldn't have been coming in. There was no control over it at that stage. So, c apparently there was a hell of a lot of illegal arms came into Australia during the Vietnam conflict and whether blokes did it intentionally to make money or anything who knows? There was probably a bit of everything. Some blokes might a brought 'em back just to have a keepsake hangin' on the wall. But it's still a bit dangerous having a

23:00 blinkin' dangerous keepsake hangin' on the wall.

**Yeah.**

Better left over there.

**You mentioned that there was a bit of ribbing going on with the Yanks. How did you use humour to alleviate any sort of personal stress that you might a been going through during your time there?**

Well, I guess that was one way of relieving it was if you felt a bit uptight or something, well

23:30 if Mr Gullible American came down the, came walking along or walked into the camp and you felt like lettin' off a bit of steam well if you could do it with a bit a humour well why not? And as I say, quite a lot a the Americans, because they didn't, I don't think they understand or understood our humour and also, really after watching Bob Hope a couple a times I, and also

24:00 watching him on TV, but I don't think in a lot a cases Australians understand a lot of American humour either. But in most cases as far as humour goes you got a be pretty well up with politics. Whether you be American, a Pom or what, although I think English humour takes a beating as we knew it but that's startin' to get a bit hard now too I think.

**Would you play pranks on each other?**

Amongst ourselves?

**Yeah.**

Yeah. It breaks the monotony.

24:30 **Can you remember one of these pranks? You know a couple a guys with a couple a dozers and few spanners what do you do to each other?**

Yeah. Nothing, I don't think there was ever anything. I can't think of anything sort of dangerous or anything. But probably just silly little things. Like, well I was the unit barber I s'pose

25:00 and I bought a little like electric hair clipping set at the American PX and, anyway we didn't care what we looked like. We weren't out there to impress anyone. We weren't gonna see our loved ones for a long time and things. So anyway I used to give the boys a haircut for a can a beer. That's like, well 68 blokes all they got was a straight rip off the top you know, like I had a pair a electric ones.

25:30 That'd be a can a beer. Sometimes if it was a busy night I'd be a bit blinkin' not much good after the haircuttin' had finished but still able to carry out my chores. But I think there's still a photo there a one a the blokes I gave him he, c they didn't know what they were gettin' but I gave him an Apache haircut and just silly things you know. But it didn't matter. He wore that till it grew out again. But yeah, just a bit of harmless humour. There was nothin' never anything sort of

26:00 dangerous I don't think. But talking about dangerous things I s'pose one night I was duty NCO in camp, this is still back in Bien Hoa and whole mob a Yanks had come over and 'course there was a lot a beer flowing and that, and anyway a fight developed between two rival American units.

26:30 And they were both big black blokes and they were full of grog and anyway they pulled knives on each other and they were gonna slice each other up. So Mac yells out and he said, "Rod you're the duty NCO get over there and break it up." I said, "Oh yeah." I said, "What do I do if they don't?" He said, "Shoot the bastards." And I said, "Hey hang on, you know." You're put in a situation where you've got a couple of, they were pretty big hefty fellas big black fellas with a knife each. They're tryin' to kill each other.

27:00 They're not in the best frame of mind and I'm told to go in and break 'em up. In those days I'm a bit lighter than what I am now probably, still I would a been a lot fitter then but not silly enough to get in between two blokes wielding knives and I had me trusty old Owen gun and Mac just said, "Shoot 'em. Or shoot one of 'em, that'll stop it if they won't break it up." Anyway with a bit a yelling and things we finally got 'em sorted out and well we got their own boys from their

27:30 own units. Just said, "Look drag 'em off, get 'em out of here. Best thing you go back to your own camps." But it was a bit scary. Something awful could have happened. Like if I'd turned around and shot the bloke I would have been all sorts of trouble too. Bad enough there's a good chance of getting shot by the enemy you don't want to run around with the chance of getting shot by one of your so-called allies. But that was the sort of thing that went on. And well, grog does some pretty awful

28:00 things at times. It can make comedians out of otherwise sort of people or vice versa. It can make pretty vicious people out of some people too. I've been there and done all of it I suppose at different times in my life.

**Were there any send offs when you would you know leave the base that you were at?**

Na. No not that I can recollect. No because

28:30 as units like Bien Hoa and that we were an individual unit and we did our own thing. When we went away from the Australian. That's the only thing I just can't recollect now whether 1 Battalion actually left. They never left Bien Hoa and came with us down to Vung Tau I'm sure they didn't. But the rest of the Australian units did. Like all of us that came went to Vietnam on the Sydney then disembarked in Vung Tau

29:00 and then moved on to Bien Hoa. We were on Bien Hoa until whatever it was, April or something in 1966, and then we moved more or less en masse to Vung Tau. Cause the 161 Recce Flight when we went down there they sort of... We were levelling doing the engineer bit but they were moving in right behind us and pitching their own tents and things like that.

29:30 So as far as Australian units there was no need to have sort of farewells, break ups and we never ever got close enough I suppose to the Americans even though we were attached to them attached as in that we were under American command from that direction while we were on Bien Hoa but, yeah never close enough to ever have a big booze up and a going away party or anything like that, no.

30:00 **You mentioned that you used to listen to Good Morning Vietnam?**

Yeah, that was a song wasn't it or something as well but...

**Yeah, was this Adrian Cronauer?**

I dunno what their name was.

**You know the movie that was made with Robin Williams ?**

Yes, there was a, that's how the American Armed Forces Radio used to come on every morning, was Good Morning Vietnam and all this sort of stuff. But if we could listen to something else

30:30 most of the time we'd try and listen to something else because a lot of it was American bullshit. Shouldn't say these things I suppose.

**Well no, it's your point of view of you know what you're experiencing as an Australian at the time and you've got a very relevant point because if you know the only sort of radio service that's going on belongs to the Yanks you know, then?**

Yeah. Unless you had a pretty good radio you couldn't always get radio Australia. I forget what the hiccups were, I don't even know where they broadcast from.

31:00 I think they were broadcasting from Singapore or something. I'm not sure. But it was at times very hard to get anything else, but what'd they call themselves? American Armed Forces Radio something like that they'd use the initials.

**Was it just talk back about American issues?**

No, they'd... Well a bit of that. A lot of probably their music and that but I dunno they were different.

31:30 Yeah, just the way they presented their show and that was different I guess. But we didn't have too much time for listening to radio and that but it was nice at night time sometime to be able to just lie back on your bunk when you're absolutely buggered after doing about 24 hours, and just maybe listen to some music or something for a while. I, my radio had a tape recorder in it, used to get just

32:00 the odd tapes and things like that, like musical tapes but you couldn't get all that much in those days. Not a hell of a lot of musical tapes I suppose. I never had a heap of 'em. But most of the taping was different to what we know it all. Well that's all nearly finished now, it's all CDs [compact disc] now a course, but the tapes and such were a bit different too. You had the big tapes like they use in

32:30 radio stations and things like that but...

**Reel to reels?**

Yeah. But I think from memory my radio I used to be able to play those little tapes or a different one. I just forget now. Used to get a bit of music out of something anyhow. But it was a, it certainly it was an eye opener to live with or live alongside the Americans.

- 33:00 But I think there was so much politics in the American bit like the, when I'd be saying the wrong thing in saying the average American that came to America [Vietnam], because I don't think he was the average American. I feel that he was railroaded into, he was cannon fodder, just shoved off to Vietnam and he might a been some poor bugger that had the, be in the
- 33:30 unfortunate situation where he lived on the streets and joinin' the army was the best thing he could do to get a feed and then whatever. I dunno I think there was quite a lot a that. And as I say quite a lot a coloured fellas. Hell of a lot of, and the ones I met all of 'em were pretty good blokes too. Or seemed to be. Actually the average black bloke seemed a bit more intelligent than the average white bloke that I ran into in the other ranks in what's a name.

**That's interesting.**

- 34:00 Yeah, that's the way it always seemed to me and I did hear other blokes comment much the same way. In other words the odd white ones that you got in the divisions were straight out and out sort of deadbeats or something like that. Whereas the blackfella he could be a very intelligent sort of a fella, but as far as politics in America at the time and possibly even still the same he was just cannon fodder. Didn't matter who he is,
- 34:30 shove 'em in the army, he'll be right. He'll make up the numbers. And when you see how many Americans were killed in action in Vietnam, I bet 75% of them were at least black fellas. I would just about hazard a guess on that anyhow.

**Did you have any contact, I'm particularly thinking of Vung Tau with local Vietnamese you know with menial tasks and jobs?**

No. Not at all really. I think

- 35:00 the big risk there was c they, we never at that stage had, or had any Vietnamese helpers to do anything if that's the way you were sort of....

**Yeah.**

No, because the danger there was you wouldn't know whether you were getting a goodie or a baddie. That would've been the problem. Like he could a come in and sabotaged your, yeah. Would a been very dangerous I think. That would be the

- 35:30 reason that they didn't. But as a person myself I wouldn't trusted one as far as you could throw 'em. But that's probably, it's bred into you because you're bred to be or told to be very cautious and things like that. But I guess I just got... I was helping out on a gate guard post going...
- 36:00 There was a road went the edge of the Nui Dat camp and I was there one day when they pulled up this family and that and three or four of the kids had blinkin' grenades and everything on 'em, strapped to 'em. Like you, the only way to do it if it really came to a point was pull the trigger first and ask questions later if you thought. But it quite often happened and it got to the stage you couldn't trust anyone. This is why you were
- 36:30 pretty if you went out on the grog and that it paid to stay, well not write yourself off sort a thing. If you happened to go out on the grog it could be a very dangerous thing to do. But yeah, from the little kids from this high up to whatever well they were all being pressed into service in some way or another in a lot a cases. Some of 'em were probably
- 37:00 all right. Poor little buggers were probably starving and they were on the scrounge for whatever they could get so they could have their next meal. But they might've already got their next meal organised by saying to the little North Vietnamese codger up the street, "Look you take these and hand them over to that Australian man you see down there, and run like billy-oh [fast]." So you didn't know whether that might happen or not. So you don't get any second chances, so you don't take any
- 37:30 chances I reckon.

**Were you told anything about the Vietnamese before you actually arrived in Vietnam?**

No, not that I can recollect. No. We were pretty I think I mentioned before from the lowest rank to probably the highest rank was very much in the dark of what we were walking into and what it was gonna be like. I don't think there was

- 38:00 probably very much homework done in those days. The only thing they'd done of course they were committed to Vietnam in what 1963, I think first they sent the training team over there. Well I don't whether those blokes sort of had much bearing in letting anyone know the actual facts of how people lived or whatever over there, I don't know. They might not have been in a position to let people know.
- 38:30 But yes, I think probably we were uninformed or ill informed. Probably ignorance would be the biggest factor. I think anyhow. And it probably still is a factor where anyone goes to war I s'pose really. It's gonna happen for a long time yet. We're still gonna be fighting a long time
- 39:00 from now I guess, but no, it's not real nice thought but unfortunately it's probably a fact.

**By the time your tour was coming to and end in Vietnam had you had enough?**

Yes, I think I had and I think all the boys had and well some of our other blokes they'd done a lot and done a lot more than I had in as much as, because that was part of their job. Like there was no way you would've gotten me to go down one a

39:30 these tunnels and crawled along a lot of 'em, were only big enough to crawl along on like this like on your elbows and pull yourself along and there was no way you could turn around once you got down there. You had to either back out or find another way out. There's no way you would a got me down there. I think I'm claustrophobic anyhow so it probably wouldn't just the thought a going down there is a no no, and any bloke which quite a

40:00 lot of 'em did of our unit, any of 'em that went down there well I got all the admiration under the sun for 'em. A pretty scary thing to do I think. But that was what they volunteered for. Well in part I s'pose. I bet when they first joined the army they probably never thought well I'll be goin' down a tunnel. That'll be fun. I don't think they would a been thinking along those lines. But they did it and

40:30 did it well.

**Were you counting down the days to when you would go back to Australia?**

Yeah, I think you start that from the day you land there just about. Like you'd hear someone'd walk past and you'd say to some new blokes comin' in only 200 days to go. Yeah. New chums on the block were the ones. They're usually give each other a bit of a ribbing one way or another you'd see the new blokes marching in and they'd be

41:00 all spic and span and you'd say it under your breath there'd be a sergeant or a sergeant major there and hip-ho left-right and you'd say to yourself what you doin' that in another bloody or so mate. But that still happens today. Anywhere like in that sort of a situation it would happen anywhere. With Aussies it would anyhow I think. I can imagine it happening on the blinkin' on Gallipoli

41:30 sort a thing. I'd imagine they would a been doin' the same things as blokes were getting' shot alongside of 'em. It's just that's an Aussies way I think. Whether the Yanks do it too I dunno. I s'pose they do. But you see that even back in any service but in Australia in the trade training school and that, everyone you won't... I think the favourite sayin' of everyone, "You'll be sorry. You'll be sorry," and you hear it.

## **Tape 8**

**00:32 How much feedback did you hear from the tunnels that were excavated?**

We used to hear most of it. Well all of it I guess, because when any patrol that went out and they did come into contact with tunnels and our blokes had to clear 'em, well when they came back they had a debriefing back at camp and anything that they'd learnt was passed on

01:00 mainly to the for the benefit of the other fellas that would have to be goin' down some tunnels again tomorrow or whenever. But also they debriefed 'em apparently, like I only found this out later, well that's touched in on this in the writings in this book that I have. The boss, our skipper was sending the information also back to Australia

01:30 through the channels so that it could pass on at the army school of engineering for later engineers coming to Vietnam to do the same job. So yes, they were passing it on and what they were finding and what booby traps and things that could be found in the area. And if they ever found any strange weapons or anything in most cases they were brought back to

02:00 camp and after if they'd been, well they'd delouse 'em make sure they weren't dangerous but then leave 'em out for all the blokes to have a look at so that they'd become familiar with any a the funny little gremlins that might be down there. But yeah, they certainly passed the information on.

**What kind a things did they find and describe?**

Well there was things like home made grenades and if they

02:30 if they did find grenades or any sort of armaments at all again they were brought back but also they were photographed and pulled to bits. After pulled to bits fairly carefully in most cases some a the home if you'd get a home made sort of an explosive of any sort well you've got to be doubly careful because it's probably possibly quite

03:00 unstable and you don't know how it's been. It's been shoved together by someone who probably reckons well this'll do the job. This'll go bang and kill someone so it doesn't matter if how quick the fuse is and things. So they've got to carefully pull it apart and work out how and why it works. In some cases they brought back quite big caches of small arms like old rifles and that, but some

- 03:30 a their guns and some of the equipment they found was very old. Like it comes from way back in the French when the French days and all that sort of stuff. A lot apparently in later days when they found the bigger lots of tunnels there were they got to the stage where they had hospitals and everything underground. They had all sorts of things apparently. But
- 04:00 our blokes were just, they were learners they were at school goin' down and as I said, I've got a hell of a lot of respect for blokes that were game enough to go down there and crawling around and not knowing what'll be round the next corner. Some of the things that could've been used and I never heard any stories of anyone going round the corner and finding say apparently they used to leave little vipers snakes hanging by
- 04:30 the tails, just in the tunnels and if you walked around or crawled around and you met one of these head on and you were too close there was a good chance you'd get nipped. Don't think any of our chaps actually physically bumped into that situation themselves but there was some pretty devious sort of little tricks they apparently used to do to cover their own backs I s'pose.

**What were some of the more frightening experiences they might've shared with you?**

- 05:00 Gee.

**Can you recall any now or...?**

Not off hand. Rackin' the brains [trying to think] a bit now. But quite often like it'd be usually over a few beers or something. Like after they'd if they'd been debriefed but then sometimes you might hear a little bit more over a few beers and they're just completely relaxed. Cause sometimes when even on any sort of a patrol when

- 05:30 blokes came back in they'd still in most cases be up pretty tight and it takes a while to unwind again and get back onto normal landing ground I think. But nothin' like a little bit of alcohol to loosen up the vocal cords or something I s'pose. But I just can't think of anything off hand now.

**That's OK. How relieved were you to be coming home?**

- 06:00 Yeah, looking forward to it. It well people have often asked me what I thought of my I only ever did one tour of Vietnam, what I thought of my tour of Vietnam and I said my answer has always been, it might sound silly to some people but I enjoyed it as an experience and it was an experience to me
- 06:30 albeit a different experience. But I think I learnt a hell of a lot from it possibly about, well when you live in a 4-man tent with, well in my case we were in a 4-man tent but there was 3 of us. They put us 3 RAEME blokes in a tent on our own. And when ya live with 3 blokes in a tent like that for 12 months virtually under canvas
- 07:00 you can learn a lot of different things I think about people and even just in a little tent city of 60 blokes. When there's just 60 of ya. Although the main part of that like we were our own little village in Vietnam, in Bien Hoa we made our own little camp and we were all a pretty close knit unit I think.
- 07:30 We had our little differences and things. Odd arguments'd come up over in most cases because you're getting a bit uptight and it's like anywhere an argument might arise. I don't think there was too, there probably was the odd fisticuff business came into it but because you're living in each others pocket it's bound to happen. It happens anywhere and, but it was an experience of a lifetime and
- 08:00 I don't regret in any way of volunteering to go to Vietnam. We were told that it had to be done and we believed it and well the government of the day too they obviously believed it and they, I guess in retrospect now they were told by the United States. But the United States I s'pose they
- 08:30 believed in what they were doing too. So all in all we all had to believe in what we were doin' or no one would have been there I don't think.

**How did you get home?**

We flew home. A nice big Qantas Boeing 707 I think it was, and the worst thing about that is we got on the plane in on Tan Son Nhut airport and we thought oh you beauty we're goin' out of there

- 09:00 and then the plane taxied out to the end of the strip and everything shut down. And they said over the PA [public address] we're not going anywhere just yet. There's a, we could see it goin' on, there was a mortar attack over the other side of the airport and there was mortar bombs goin' off and there was blinkin' F16's or some sort of American fighters taking off and all warplanes take precedence over civilian aircraft. So
- 09:30 we had to sit on the ground and we thought, oh well we're probably not gonna go over here. We'll get blown out of sky before we even get into the sky. But anyway we finally got goin' but the other thing we were disappointed in, is we were a whole blinkin' plane load of Australian hungry soldiers and they put all male bloody crew on this plane. We could drink all we wanted or do whatever we wanted goin' home on that plane but they were, there was no hosties
- 10:00 only hosts.

### **And was it a pretty raucous trip home?**

Not really c I was too crook from the. We did, when I say when Denise [interviewer] asked me before did we have any send offs we did have a send off in the pits up in Nui Dat before we left to come down to Tan Son Nhut to take off and I'd devoured most of my black label Johnny Walker

- 10:30 that I had a case of to bring home and I was crook for a week after I got home in Australia. But anyway, yeah that was mostly sickheads on the plane actually. I dunno whether that was bit of airsickness and a bit of everything but most blokes had celebrated the fact that we were leaving country I think.

### **What happened when you arrived home?**

it was all pretty hush-hush actually. When

- 11:00 there was no... My wife was there and the kids and that and same as the other blokes just their particular immediate family. But that was about all there was no big welcoming home committees and that. Well we probably didn't think much about it at the time. We were just glad enough to just get home and we had to actually get over to 2 Camp Hospital at Ingleburn as quick as possible and we had to have, I dunno some medical thing done before we were completely let loose. But
- 11:30 as far as any welcome home thing there was nothing much and when we stepped off that plane that was probably the last time I saw probably 65 of the 68 blokes that I went to Vietnam with. I haven't seen 'em since. Which is probably,
- 12:00 we as a 3 Field Troop as a unit to my knowledge they haven't had a reunion or anything, whether I possibly if they were to have a reunion I'd possibly try and make it if I could. But it'd bring back quite a few memories I'd say and I'd more than likely would, there's only, I've been to one reunion over Vietnam times which was in 1999 at Bandiana in
- 12:30 Victoria where I did my trade training. The corps of RAEME had a RAEME Vietnam Veterans reunion it was quite a big one actually in '99 but neither of the chaps, the RAEME chaps that I served with there they, neither of them were there at that. But still there was, what'd they say? They at that stage there was three and a half thousand RAEME personnel served in Vietnam and
- 13:00 there was 300 at the big reunion. So.

### **That's only a small percentage?**

It doesn't sound many and actually at the reunion when I got there I think Mavis was with me, I dunno, I met about 5 people I think that I knew from the corps and a couple of them, well I had seen them in years gone past. But the rest of 'em no, I didn't know 'em. I was,

- 13:30 actually I was a bit disappointed to go so far to leave, well I was living in Denmark and Aird when that came up but to go all the way to Albury and meet up with 4 or 5 blokes or whatever it was, was to me a bit of a disappointment. I s'pose half of 'em are dead or something you never know. No doubt everyone had reasons for not being able to be there.
- 14:00 But Vietnam was a necessary evil I guess but...

### **Why do you say half of them are probably dead?**

Well are, old age, there seems to be so many diseases and things around. I know several of the blokes that were just in our unit there, well there's probably 10 or 15 yeah, a good 15% of them I know are dead. But, and I guess

- 14:30 I'm not that old yet but it's startin' to sneak in a bit but a few a the blokes were a few years older than I was there. A couple that I did mention previously that they would a been a good probably 20 years older than I was then but that'd still only make 'em 70 odd then or something like that.

### **What was it like being reunited with your wife and family?**

It was sort a good first up but I think I had itchy feet within a week. In as much as I had to learn

- 15:00 to be part of a family again and it was strange. I guess the way we lived and just being in Vietnam would've had probably a bearing on that. But I probably wasn't the same bloke when I came home as before I went away, and for a while I guess I was probably quite intolerant with three little kids runnin' round
- 15:30 under your feet after 12 months of virtually doing as you wished but differently like in an army way. And I dunno I had developed a quite a big curse by then and probably drank way too much, but possibly a lot of us did.
- 16:00 I dunno but I drank a lot.

### **How much pressure had being away put on your relationship?**

I think a hell of a lot really. Well I did hear that my wife was having a bit of a affair with bloody, the local butcher and things like that. Well what can you do when you're bloody thousands a miles away and



things like that?

**That must a been pretty difficult news to receive when you're as you say thousands of miles away?**

Yeah it was, and

16:30 yeah it, I'm not, I'm still today not too sure. I don't think I ever got a satisfactory answer and I'm not too sure how much truth was in it and things like that but the seed a doubt was there and that doesn't help things. But then you get tossed at you, well were you a good boy all the time you were away and things like that. And it's like everything. Everything you

17:00 do every relationship it takes two to tango and I dunno I think you've got to be fairly strong or something to work it all out. In the end like a mixture of probably Vietnam me leaving Marlene with a handicapped kid and other, 2 other little boys. I think it all probably helped to cause us to separate

17:30 in what was it in 1967, only about 12 months after I got back from Vietnam. So it all...

**Was that a fairly turbulent 12 months?**

Yeah it was. Yeah, fair bit a the old yelling and screaming and I s'pose you'd call it the usual domestic problems that arise when these sort a things happen.

18:00 Having served in Vietnam certainly didn't have a good bearing on my marriage but then I dunno, who can say whether it would a lasted if I hadn't gone to Vietnam. I don't know.

**Apart from those relationship problems that you were having did you have any other difficulties settling back down in Australia after being in Vietnam?**

Well there was several. First and foremost being

18:30 the day we got off the aeroplane then course I insisted on driving and I had to drive over to 2, I mentioned havin' to go over to hospital. I dunno what the hell it was for but we had to go straight over but we could get there by our own means. So it couldn't a been all that important. But I'm thunderin' down the road and I said to Marlene, "What's this stupid bastard?" He's on the wrong side a the road coming toward me. It was me c over there we were driving on the wrong side a the road to us here.

19:00 I jumped in a blinkin' car in Sydney and I'm drivin' down the wrong side a the road. That was a bit scary for start. But I soon got over that little one. I thought well that can be a bit dangerous so I better not do that again. Yes, it took a long time to settle down and I don't... I probably I didn't ever settle down not really properly. When I got home I had somewhere in the vicinity of 3 months leave

19:30 which well, I got paid up for my leave pay and all that and then the car that we had and that I'd left Marlene with was a bit of a bomb. So anyway I went and bought nearly a brand new car so we had some decent wheels and then I went and got about a month's work helping build Ingham's WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yards out and around Liverpool to build up the kitty a little bit more. And then we came back to Western Australia, drove to Western Australia for

20:00 a couple of months or something like that we were over here of my leave. Stayed with Mum and Dad in Narrogin and then went back and I got posted to, well I knew where I was going I was posted to Sydney Area Workshops more or less pretty close to the heart of Sydney where I was promoted to sergeant. And had several different roles there in the workshop for a while

20:30 in charge of the vehicle floor as they called it and then they paid me higher duties allowance for warrant officer. And I was in charge of the Sydney Area Workshops service station which was a part of Sydney Area Workshops and I quite liked that. That was a good job servicing vehicles or supervising the servicing of vehicles from all over the Sydney metropolitan area. Like these were vehicles that were mainly

21:00 used in the carrying out of army duties around the big city. You have all the hangers on and their staff cars and things again. Its all that sort a stuff but it was a pretty good racket actually because I had a couple a civvies [civilians] and a couple a army blokes or something working under me. And there used to be a car auction up the road and we used to go and buy up these second hand cars for cheap Charlie and

21:30 spend a bit a time on 'em, mainly cleaning them up and things like that like at the army service station and we'd tizzy 'em all up and shove 'em back in the following week's auction and make a 100% profit on 'em in most cases. So it wasn't bad. We weren't actually, I s'pose there was the odd little bits and pieces of army we might a been using but not a lot because I had to account for all the gear anyhow. But it was just the time because I was able to make my own time

22:00 just about. But then I was there for quite a while and then...

**Were you there during the separation?**

Yes. And by then I had met another woman, and anyway ended up getting together but then my wife ended up dropping the three kids in my lap because at that stage I was living in the barracks at

Randwick

- 22:30 first up, and she came and dropped the kids on the lawn early one morning. So I had to get that organised a bit so I s'pose it was a matter of having to. I didn't know this woman and anyway we ended up getting together and I set her up in the house out at Holsworthy and she, well we had another two kids actually over the next 10 years
- 23:00 and she sort of helped me bring up the other kids as well. And then, well we still had Dennis all that time and after we got out a the army well little Dennis, I ended up, he's in a home in Perth. But in the end I had to get him into a home. We just couldn't handle him. Pretty hard case to look after and it was too hard for the other lady. But it was too hard for me too. I couldn't work and look after the kid as well. It was,
- 23:30 but yeah, and then in 1969 when the next brother to me was killed in a car accident so the army flew me back to WA [Western Australia] for the funeral and what have you and...

**Was the accident here in WA?**

Yes, yeah, just out at Willagee and they flew me home and it sort of upset me old Mum a hell of a lot. And anyway,

- 24:00 I had sort a said that I was probably signing on in the army again and then as soon as I did I would be, the day I signed on I'd be flying back to Vietnam with promotion to warrant officer. That didn't go down too well so I said, well things were pretty hard with the kids and that and I thought well I'd better do the right thing here and stay home and look after the kids. So I decided to snatch my time with the army.
- 24:30 Probably I think I regret the day I decided to do that because I think I probably should've signed on and stayed on and soldiered on. But again even then I knew that it would be a bit unfair to choof off [leave] back to Vietnam for another 12 months and leave my three kids from a previous marriage, one of 'em being severely handicapped
- 25:00 with another woman to look after. I thought well hardly cricket old boy, maybe you should double think that. Anyway I got out a the army in what was it June 1970 and took up civilian life again after 13 years.

**What was it like returning to civvy street?**

Funny, I was, I liked the army because I was at that stage the dizzy ranks of sergeant

- 25:30 waiting for promotion to warrant officer and going back into civvy street all of a sudden I was just a, I got a job as a mechanic with the local Holden dealer for a start and I wasn't over keen on sort of just being a lowly mechanic again. Like I was a in the army I was an artificer tradesman and pretty high paid at that. Like I was getting a lot more pay in the army than what I could even ask out on civvy street. But, and it was a different way of life and I can't
- 26:00 say I really liked it. I had enjoyed the army life more. I worked along with the Holden man for a while and then got roped in by a mutual acquaintance I s'pose you might say he was, to change and come and work for him on Chryslers and Valiants [automobiles] and things and which I did and
- 26:30 consequently did me back in tryin' to lift an engine without the use of a bloody block and tackle or something, and that sort of bugged my back for life just about from then on. But then a service station in Narrogin came up for lease and I never had much in the way of money and me Dad said, "Would you like to give the service station a go?" And I said, "Yeah I wouldn't mind." So I took on the Caltex service station in Narrogin and I had that
- 27:00 for 8 years. The first 5 years was well good, I enjoyed it everything was pretty good and, well probably less than 5 years. Then in 1976 I lent on a car door that I'd been working on, the car door was open and hit the starter button to start it up to see how it was running and the bloody thing was in reverse gear and it came back and chopped me arm of here. Smashed it completely, compound fracture.
- 27:30 And anyway I ended up in hospital for 6 8weeks while they put it back together and I never had any personal insurance but I never had anything for myself so needless to say what sort of spare money I had ended up getting pretty well eaten up. And then after that, after 1976 or, well by 1980 I was, and things were pretty tough in small business in the 1980s or early
- 28:00 1980s and I more or less walked away from the service station. While I never had any money but I didn't owe any I walked out just with nothing. And I just mooched around farm-handing, doing a bit of anything there for a while and...

**Were you still in your second relationship?**

By then no, that had fallen in a hole.

**Was that prior to moving to Narrogin or while**

- 28:30 **you were at Narrogin?**

No, that was in Narrogin. No, second relationship broke up in 1976-77 and that fell in a hole.

**What kind of difficulties did you have in your second relationship?**

Probably the biggest one was children. In as much as she was the nurse maid to my three previous kids and one of 'em

29:00 was handicapped although by then he was in a home. But it had been probably a pretty big strain anyhow, all the way. I wasn't probably the easiest fellow to live with because I still loved my grog [alcohol] too much. Yeah that's...

**What was it like returning to Narrogin though after all these years had passed you're back in your home town?**

29:30 It was pretty bloody slow, pretty and Narrogin not a very big place. About the same size as Quairading I think.

**So it's not the place you saw it as when you left Dumbleyung?**

No by no means. Coming from Dumbleyung to Narrogin, Narrogin was a wonderful place but coming from Sydney to Narrogin that was a bit of a let down. Yeah, not that even in Sydney I wasn't a night life sort of a person as in I

30:00 wasn't into going into Kings Cross and checking out all the clubs or anything like that that wasn't my scene I s'pose. But Narrogin was pretty tame and I think yeah, I still had itchy feet. I wanted to do something else. I had kids to look after and whatever but a course then by about 1976-77, well Dennis who

30:30 was the youngest, he was the youngest he was in a home. Bruce who is my eldest was a bit of a rat bag. I don't catch up with him too often these days. He's God, he's 45 years old in next month. Never been married. Never been out a jail. Never been in jail no never been out a jail that'd be closer it.

31:00 He was 17 by that stage. Steven he'd gone back to live with his mother for a while who was on the east coast and then they used to swap around a bit and then Bruce'd go over the east coast and Steve'd come back here and... They probably had a, the two elder boys probably had a very good life. The two other kids in the relationship they stayed with their mother and only in recent years in the last, well I s'pose in the last,

31:30 yeah caught up in the last 6 or 8 years. Cause like my youngest is a daughter, she's 32 now or something like that. So, and she lives just locally and second son lives just out half way between here and Denmark, and the eldest boy he's somewhere on the Murray River at Echuca or round about there I think at this

32:00 stage. But I hear from him every odd year or so. And, but he knows where I am, I can never find him. So.

**And which home did Dennis go to?**

He's at Eden Hill for physically and mentally handicapped kids but, well he's not a kid anymore. They ended up, they got a scheme going where as they'd get 3 or 4 of 'em together and they'd go out and farm 'em out and, well

32:30 I haven't heard from... It might sound a bit strange but I haven't heard for quite a few years now. But as far as I know he's still slogging along but it'd be drugs keeping him alive. Like special drugs c his brain was affected and he was subject to complete blackouts and fits and things like that. But it might sound

33:00 a bit hard or something but I can't get bring myself to even go and see him now. I dunno why. Maybe I should make a big effort and I probably should do it before, well either I pass away or he does. I don't know how he is health wise now or anything. But it's something I'll have to think about.

**Yeah, it think its something fully worth considering.**

Yes.

**What led you to move to Albany?**

33:30 Well, I moved to Denmark first. My old, well my old Dad passed away in 1991 I think it was, and then Mum passed away in '97, and well us three boys were left a reasonable inheritance and I'd been having trouble for quite a few years with my back and it was just getting so hard to keep working and I was in agony a lot a the

34:00 time so I thought, no. So I thought I'm not just gonna slave me. I'd watched blokes do it, slave away as long as I can and then not be able to do anything. I'm gonna retire now which I did and I went and bought a, well I had a home in Narrogin but I sold that and I bought a home in Denmark and I bought a little boat, and it was a little 2-storey place and by that stage I was on me own. I could

34:30 wake up in the morning and watch whether the fish were jumping out in the Wilson Inlet and then I'd hook the boat up and go fishin'. And anyway then in Denmark I was getting a bit lonely and then I met

up with Mavis and one thing led to another and we were married the day after my birthday in 2000, on my 60th birthday. And then Mavis had her own home in Denmark and I had

35:00 mine and then I thought, well I didn't have a hell of a lot in the way of spare cash or anything so we decided one way or another to, I didn't want to, well at that stage I was on a disability pension actually, so anyway I applied to the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] and they gave me a pension and things, so then... But when I married Mavis between us our assets were a bit too many so we sold up what we

35:30 had in Denmark we were gonna stay in Denmark but we couldn't find anything suitable. So we pool our resources and looked around and this is what, we ended up in Albany. And so now we're full on into fishing and Mavis grows a few flowers and we're a member of the orchid club and I'm a member of the vintage car club, and hopefully this, within the next 12 months the old Willys Whippet [automobile] that I'm building

36:00 restoring out the back will be ready for club licence and we will be participating in the Albany Easter rally in 2005.

**Something to look forward to.**

Yeah, I actually drove a car for a lady in the last rally just gone. It's quite an experience drivin' these old jalopies [automobiles] down the road. Yeah, it's good fun.

**Just wanted to ask you quickly how long did you spend alone in Denmark?**

36:30 In Denmark? About '97 about 18 months.

**Was that a valuable time for you?**

Yes, I think so. I just laid back, didn't do a lot. Although then one of the local service station blokes sort of found out and I was at a loose end and he asked me if I'd come and give him a hand for a day there, one day and I ended up being there for about 6 months. That was a bit of a cash,

37:00 just a little bit of spare work. But he was stuck he couldn't get anyone else. But yeah, it was quite good. But yeah, I enjoyed Denmark it was a nice little place. But we decided that really Albany was a better proposition. I've got a few hiccups with my back and things like that. If anything ever went wrong over in Denmark

37:30 we had to come to Albany to see the to get a even a blinkin' blood test taken just about you have to come to Albany and Mavis has got a few back problems and things. So we decided Albany was probably the way to go. So that's why we moved over here.

**Looks like it will be a good retirement.**

I think so, yes. And we're planning to leave on about the 12th of next month for a 4 month trip around Australia.

**Excellent.**

38:00 Bump into a few of old acquaintances and maybe I'll be taking my list of all the chaps were in the unit. I've got rough addresses of where most of 'em were 10 years anyhow so I may be able to look up a few. Even look in the phone book and see if some of 'em come up with. Cause there's some in Darwin. They're all over Australia. So who knows?

**Have you ever taken much interest in Anzac Day?**

Yeah, we went, I specially since I've been in Albany

38:30 here I've been in most of the marches. Except I wasn't in the 1999 one and the year before we were travelling around and we were in Queensland somewhere. But this last one just gone Mavis and I went to both the dawn service and then I participated in the actual march. But yeah, I go along and I don't really know anyone here. I'm not a good RSL [Returned and Services League] member.

**39:00 For what reasons?**

I don't know. I'm just not into sitting there and worrying about those sort of things. It's not my cup of tea. I am a member of the RSL but I'm not a good participating member unfortunately.

**When did you begin to take an interest in the RSL? Or when did you become a member I should say?**

Well I actually became a member of the Narrogin. I paid my

39:30 subs when I first got out of the army and I became a member in Narrogin in 1971, but I think I went to one meeting and then I dunno it didn't do anything to me. It yeah, just didn't do anything so I guess my, even my membership lapsed then because I never paid any but I joined, I never joined the RSL again until I came to Albany which was in, we actually moved here in 2000,

40:00 so I joined and sort of kept up the good works just in the last few years.

**And when did you begin to take an interest in Anzac Day?**

I guess I've always had an interest there. I think that's always been on. I haven't always participated like not in the actual march but whereas I probably could've been participating since 19.. when I got out a the, well before that could a participated in 1966

40:30 but.

**Is there a reason why you didn't?**

No, I don't think so. In Western Australia RSLs aren't. They're more of a social thing than the eastern states. I think possibly if I'd of still been in the eastern states I may have participated more because also it's a social more social thing. Here in Western Australia the RSL especially out in the bush like

41:00 Narrogin, there's a little hall that they have to blow the dust off the door each month when they have a meeting and then at couple I think there was only 2 of us actually at Nam the rest of the blokes were ex-Second World War and things like that. There'd be a few more shots fired after the parade. I did march in Narrogin once I think or something. And then I thought well I don't think, I think... I

41:30 can remember things I want to remember without going along to this. But I think as you become older it becomes more relevant maybe is the way to put it, I don't know. But I feel I feel more towards ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] and what it stands for now than what I did 5, 10, 15, 20 years ago. Possibly because I'm getting older.

## Tape 9

00:30 **You just mentioned that as you've become older you've begun find more relevance in Anzac Day why do you think that is?**

I think, I dunno I feel it must be something to do with well getting older and getting closer and it seems more apt to remember

01:00 the blokes because in some way I think I'm getting closer to 'em. Even if they were laying in the blinkin', well laying in the trenches and that in Gallipoli. But yeah, it just has a lot more, I sit and think about it a bit more now than what I ever did and I seem each day, as each day passes I think probably more so. Its getting older I think but also

01:30 I was pleased to see and we've noticed at the last few Anzac Days here in Albany, it seems to be getting to the younger people a lot more now. Whether it's because of more media sort of coverage and hype I don't know. But there's more kids at the Albany Anzac Day parade here than there is

02:00 sort of other people I think, like adults and things like that. But and there was you weren't down here for the dawn service. The dawn service here was a blinkin', well that's the first one I've been to here in Albany but it was a pretty stirring sort of a thing really. The only thing is it was completely overcast and you couldn't see the sun tryin' to get up it was pitch black. But yeah, it's quite a moment actually and there was a lot a people up there. I

02:30 dunno whether you went up there. Have you been up to the monument?

**We're going to visit the monument in the morning before we head back to Perth.**

Right, yeah.

**What do you think that growing popularity towards Anzac Day means?**

Well, it's a bit, I don't know. That's what we've been trying to fathom. As I said before, whether it's more a, well media coverage and communication. People,

03:00 the young people of today are taught more about it. Just before Easter one a my little granddaughters got to me on the phone and said, "Pop would you come to the school and come into my class and show my class your medals?" And obviously they'd been taught it. Like this is a little girl. She's in first year school you know. She's 6 years old whatever and I said, "Yes love, I can do that," and

03:30 I thought it was great. But yeah when a little kid well she was sort a put up to it by her teacher I guess but the kids are remembering too and yeah, it's good.

**Did you go into the classroom?**

Yeah, oh yeah, and then...

**What happened in the classroom?**

There was another lady there, just deviating a little bit. She'd been

04:00 asked the same to come in, she was the grandmother of another little girl whose grandfather and a great grandfather I think it was. Her grandfather had served the Second World War and her great grandfather had been at Gallipoli or something. But they just asked to come out the front and show their medals, and little Hayley was with me

04:30 and just told them where I'd been to Vietnam and things. They're only like little toddlers like, whether it meant much to them I don't know. But then last week my son called up and said, "Dad can you tell me exactly what those medals are?" They took photos and that at the school and they must be doin' a bit of a school photo or putting in the thing or something so they wanted to know each medal meant and things

05:00 like that, and got to me a bit.

**Did they ask you any questions?**

No, not a lot. I probably volunteered just a little bit, like their little toddlers it's not much going into much depth. They never had much time I don't think. Well they probably did have more they could've made more time it wouldn't have mattered but it was one of those things just play it by ear a

05:30 little bit. But yeah, I felt pretty honoured to be in class in front of these little kids actually.

**It sounds like you shared a beautiful moment.**

Yeah, it was good.

**Well I'd just like to thank you for spending the day with us today Rod. It's been a pleasure meeting you and thanks for sharing your experiences with us.**

All right and thank you very much. We may meet again one day somewhere.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**