Australians at War Film Archive

George Mansford (Snow) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 15th July 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1768

Tape 1

00:30 **So George we might just get you to start talking about where you were born and where you grew up, just get a bit of detail about your early life?**

Well that's a confession. I was born in 1934 in Western Australia at a place called Beachborough

01:00 which was a short distance from Perth. Grew up there on an Aboriginal mission with my family. Mother and father obviously, and one brother and a sister at that time. And when the war came in 1939 Dad joined the army. He was a World War I veteran, but he decided he was going to go again and he took off.

01:30 And I can recall when the Japanese came into the war we were going to have to move back to a place called Guilford. From there I kicked around as a youngster, doing all of the things boys did in those days, diving off bridges into the Swan River and that sort of thing. Eventually left school at the age of fifteen joined the post office.

02:00 **Can I just ask before we race ahead, the mission, was that called Beachborough as well?**

Well it was at Beachborough but what it was called I don't know. My father was involved in the administration of it and as far as I can recall we were the only white people there, and so most of my playmates were little black fellows. Until I started going to school at a

02:30 place called Eden Hills.

What can you tell me about your early interactions with Aboriginal people, it sounds like a very free way to grow up?

I wouldn't call it free, it was far more discipline and direction given to children in those days than they do in today's society. It was a very guided approach. But there was a lot of time spent wandering around the bush

03:00 because it was all bush. And the Aborigine community in those days was very scattered, they lived in bark huts basically, you know as close as you would probably get to their original living conditions before the white man came. I simply used to play with them and there was no difference, we made our own rules, like all children we made our own laws

03:30 and I got on well with them, still do. Up the road at Yarrabah, communicated with the elders there as much as possible.

Was it a few tribes that were there at the reservation?

I think it was just the one group in those days, that was the '30s, that was before the white man in that area anyway decided to Christianise them and group them into their areas,

04:00 so they were still pretty free. And I am pretty certain they received no social benefits in those days. There was a fair bit of hunting and so forth.

Did you have much opportunity to go with them or sample their bush tucker [food]? Did they show you things?

Rarely. The children,

04:30 they certainly weren't part of the hunting game, probably part of the food gathering, but not of any significance. I mean they had been exposed to civilisation, there was probably the odd tin of meat in the bark hut. But I hadn't been exposed to that, I was only four or five at that stage and started school probably around six years of age, so

05:00 was still very much an infant and kept out of the mainstream of survival.

Can you tell me a bit more about what your Dad's job involved there?

My Dad was a bit of a cook, an administrator and a cook. Once again I don't know much about my father, when he left to join the army the second time I only saw him two or three times

05:30 during the war when he would come home and he died very shortly after that war. He was a very reticent sort of individual. And so I never really got to know my father.

What can you tell me about your mother?

She was a wonderful hard bitten pioneer Australian. She came from a family of Irish background who had arrived in Perth in the very early days for the settlement, 1825 or around that area.

06:00 She was a tough woman, resourceful woman, resilient., brilliant humour. And obviously had a hard life. They were married as the Depression broke out. She was younger than Dad and she also belonged to the Catholic Church and because she married Dad, who was a Protestant, she

06:30 was excommunicated [banned from the church]. Which is ironic because many years later I married a Catholic as a Proddy [Protestant], and you look back on the comparison of those two times and it is very difficult to understand the bigotry and stupidity that existed here in Australia at that time. We know it still exists in the world, but thank God we got rid of it in Australia.

So do you remember when you were growing up there was still a Catholic/Protestant divide?

Oh yeah absolutely. I mean just the other day

07:00 an old army mate of mine and myself were talking about it. He was a Catholic, a 'Mick' and I was a 'Proddy' and he was brought up in Victoria and I was brought up in Western Australia and it came as no surprise to either of us, I mean we used to fight with the Micks and the Micks used to fight with us. We went to different schools, and even as children then you became aware of the differences in how people preached and

07:30 and did things. As I saw it as a youngster, I could be wrong, but certainly the evidence is there, my mother and in another generation there was a more sensible approach and I married a Catholic, so we became very much the mixed family.

08:00 **So was your family a bit unusual – one Catholic one Protestant – was that something that people would have noticed?**

No I don't think so. I think there were more pressing things on their minds in those days, like the Depression and the need to survive. I think if there was bigotry, and there was bigotry on both sides, it would highlight itself with those who were more devout, who would be in church

08:30 more often. Although my parents were devout, they weren't in a position to go out practicing every Sunday because we were out in the bush.

I have heard people say you went to the Catholic butcher or the Protestant butcher?

I don't know certainly from my experience, there was only one butcher in town and if you didn't go to him you went hungry. No I don't think it went that far at all.

09:00 Unless you are talking about in some of the suburbs of the bigger cities where you might have had a Catholic community versus the Protestant one, but no. The interesting thing about all of that, and this leads up to the military, is that there was no such thing existed in the military. It was the great educator of getting rid of bigotry, be you black white brown or brindle, be you Catholic, Proddy, a Jew or whatever you might be. You were a

09:30 soldier, and that's what the military was concerned about, and it was a wonderful institution.

What can you tell me about your schooling?

I suppose it is true to say I am rather amused by modern psychologists when they talk about the hang ups the youngsters have and so forth. I suspect that they didn't understand what went around in the 30's and 40's.

10:00 I was continually moved from school to school, as I mentioned I went to Eden Hills when I was old enough and we had no sooner settled there than we went to Guildford. Because of the Japanese threat. And then for whatever reason Dad was in the army at that stage and my Mum was running a fish and chip shop called 'The Fair Dinkum Aussie' next to the railway

10:30 line I can still see all of the air-raid shelters there. For whatever reason we moved out of there when I was in second class and I duly arrived at Bassendean and I was put into third class. So there was a fair degree of confusion and lack of standardisation I assume, and of course I couldn't cope, and was sacked and put down to second class where I should have been in the first place.

11:00 That was in itself a little trauma I think., I can remember corporal punishment, getting the cuts [hits with cane or strap]. I can remember digging the trenches and the school teacher telling us to get under the benches of the school with our mouths open and our ear plugs in our mouth, crouched in case of bombing. I remember the air-raid drills well.

11:30 I can remember blackouts at home. I can remember the postman coming around and the immense emotion because we lived in a street where virtually there was no fathers, the men were all gone. It was run by the mothers and the young men, young men being teenagers as I saw them, in those days they were the young men, or the old men. And because it was that area of

12:00 Bassendean it was predominantly women, they were both mother and father in those days. There was one particular area of the street where, during the war in the Middle East, one of our Western Australian battalions had taken terrible casualties in El Alamein and that transferred itself into the street. There was a lot of grieving and weeping, I remember all of that. I remember the Americans coming,

12:30 I remember the aircraft coming over. I remember listening to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and later on when the V [rocket] bombs were devastating London and I can still here the bloke telling us that the war might be lost, because of that secret weapon. I can remember my school teacher in 1944 in fourth year,

13:00 she had a map placed on the board. She put a soldier with white crayon there, and it was the landing at Normandy. We had landed in Europe, being the Allies. And I can remember her later on that year weeping because she lost her fiancé in New Guinea.

13:30 **How were the kids coping with that, did they think it was a game? How was the war impacting on normal childhood?**

14:00 Well I am pretty certain that we knew it wasn't a game. Our fathers were away, brothers sister cousins and all of that sort of thing. But I think there was that barrier with youth or infants between reality and the

14:30 world we lived in, we shut it out. Again I go back to the headshrinkers [psychiatrists], if they went back [to that time] now. I can remember the drawings we used to draw, they started telling us what we had to draw because we were drawing tanks or aircraft in searchlights, and so forth. So obviously they were aware it was

15:00 making an impact, but I don't think it made any significant impact on our future attitudes or anything, in fact if anything I think it was a bonus.

Did you or your friends feel unsafe or not secure because your fathers were gone?

I don't know, we were happy children,

15:30 we played, we fished, we ran. We got the cuts at school, again no trauma there. We did everything and I guess that would be attributed to the fact that we had our mothers. Who were very fine obviously, outstanding people, they were a great example of motherhood. And then of course you had your other structures, you had your school teachers who were very much a part of

16:00 the social fabric and you had the police, you had the local police sergeant, the butcher, the baker, the milkman. It was a community that got on with life.

And I guess a lot of women like your mother, this was the second war for them because your father had been in World War I?

Well it wasn't for my mother, she didn't meet Dad until after the war.

16:30 She was born in 1904, so she was still a young girl when the war broke out, but she certainly would have been exposed to World War I, and we are probably side tracking. I have always made the point publicly and elsewhere, if you look at our history that particular generation that

17:00 grew up in World War I, they saw the impact of their fathers or elder brothers or relatives going to war, and in the 20's they saw the impact of that war because of Australia's terrible loss, not only the dead, but the maimed. The people who were gassed. My step father was such a bloke, he coughed his lungs out later on in life, after I lost my father and my

17:30 Mum remarried. So they had that impact on them, but they didn't make any excuses for their behaviour in society; they got on with life, and then they went smack bang into a depression young people who should have been enjoying life. As we know the Great Depression was a terrible thing.

18:00 Another interesting observation to note that during that Depression there was no anarchy and rioting and so forth, there was still a very disciplined society here in Australia. Even though there was virtually starvation. And a lot of pride. And those same youngsters, as they just came out of that they thought they had their youth in front of

18:30 them, World War II came, and they didn't break down or whatever, they got on with life. And my mother was one of them, one of millions, and they didn't flinch. And because of that they didn't expect their children to behave badly. Perhaps the most classic example of that, I can still remember as a kid going back to your

19:00 question, we were well informed, certainly in my area, I had lots of uncles involved as well. London was being bombed, we had been kicked out of Europe, we had lost Greece and Crete, Singapore had fallen Darwin was being bombed, we lost the [cruiser HMAS] Sydney with all hands, all of these disasters one after the other and the Japanese invading in

19:30 New Guinea. And yet they would still have sing songs on a Saturday night and sing It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow. Work that one out. That's a tough determined generation, magnificent. And if we ever had to learn anything from history, it is how to perform when the chips are down [life is tough].

So how were you getting this news of the war, was the radio important to you, or was it more newspapers?

20:00 We didn't get that many newspapers but certainly the radio or the wireless as it was. It was an important instrument within every home. And then there would be the letters from people, generally speaking it was the radio. Of course there was censorship, some of the things I am talking about you would only hear about much later.

20:30 **So would your whole family gather around the radio at night to listen to things?**

Absolutely.

Could you set the scene a bit?

There would be a time when the entire family would sit down under the kerosene lamp or hurricane lamp or whatever to begin with, and then we moved in where there was light, so that was a luxury. And in winter there would be a fire behind us because there was no heating.

21:00 And you didn't bathe every night because there was just the one bath and you had to transfer the water from a copper to the bath, that was before the heaters came in, which was another luxury. So when you talk about day to day routine, the family would be at that table and certainly the

21:30 mother she was both mother and father, it was the same setting I can recall when my father was there. We would sit around the table, that was a ritual you would sit around and talk. There would be a prayer before the meal and simple one, we weren't fanatics but it was there.

22:00 It was obviously a simple one because Mum never imposed her Catholic experience on us. I should mention there just that that's the second time I have mentioned Catholic experience, the interview should not be suspecting that I am a bigot in regards to Catholics I am not. In fact I only said it last Sunday at a gathering in the Tablelands, the Catholic priests

22:30 in the army were the most outstanding, the most wonderful individuals I ever saw, they shone out. But back to the point, dinner was a ritual and it was at that table where you would be asked about your school work or what was going on tomorrow. It was also a time to allocate the task for the next day. "You will do this and you will do that, and pass the bread."

23:00 **So tell me if your father wrote a letter to your mother, would she read that out to everyone?**

No I don't recall any letters, there probably were but they may well have been personal. I mean after Dad, he was only one of millions, after Dad had left to join the army, it was just an accepted thing,

23:30 Dad was in the army.

And you didn't really hear anything?

I didn't, I can say that honestly, maybe I was too busy fishing. Maybe I was too indifferent to it, I don't know, certainly I can't recall any letters. And if there were letters there wouldn't have

24:00 been the luxury of a letter to me or my sister and brothers, the other one arrived during the war. It would have simply been the need to communicate with the head of the family, which was Mum.

Were you the eldest in your family?

No my sister was, eldest boy, yeah.

Did all of the boys take on more responsibility because their fathers were away, did you notice a shift having to grow up a bit more?

24:30 It didn't surprise me, I think that was normal whether my father had have been home or not. It was a pattern and it was a pattern I practised, that as youngsters are growing up they are given more responsibility and it is a responsibility that they are expected to carry out.

So would you help your mother with your younger siblings in terms of jobs?

25:00 We had jobs, absolutely. It was an era of male supremacy in those days, or accepted that boys were much better on jobs outside the house and girls were far better inside the house. But having said

25:30 that, I would have to make my own bed, I would have to help with dishes, but other than that I would

chop the wood, I would keep the garden clean, I would do all sorts of things outside the house. Inside the house was the girls' territory, generally speaking.

Do you have any strong memories of when war was declared?

Absolutely,

26:00 we were still out on this area, out in the Aboriginal community and I walked in and my mother was crying. And I can still see it, don't ask me how. If I had started school it was only just, I was only five. And I can still see the headline, War, 'W A R' in big black print and Mum was crying.

26:30 **And did life change quickly after that in terms of your father's decision?**

I can't remember that, we moved out of there, and I am not sure if Dad moved while he was there or he took us out of that first, but I remember shortly after that Dad did the

27:00 disappearing act and next time I saw him he was in uniform.

When you said that your mother was working at a fish and chip shop in Guilford, your father had already gone, did a lot of women start working and taking on jobs?

I don't know.

What do you remember about your Mum's job?

Well the fish and chip shop was there and we lived at the back of it, and so it was home.

27:30 I assume it was another form of income, well obviously it was. It was one of those places where Mum cooked the fish and chips. It wasn't for long though, we moved to Bassendean.

And you said there were already air-raid shelters there, were they

28:00 **throughout your town on every corner or what are we talking here?**

There were two types of air-raid shelters, three really if you count the schools. There were the air-raid shelters that were community air-raid shelters that were always located in the shopping area, and with Guilford which when I look back with my military experience I think, how stupid was that?

28:30 All of the air-raid shelters were parallel to the railway lines. Well the first thing that would be bombed would be the railway line and here are these air-raid shelters next to it. I can remember we were never allowed in the air-raid shelters, the Americans were around in those days and that was obviously a place where sex and all of these other things went on, and of course being a young boy we were always curious about these things. But they were very basic primitive, just a hole in the ground lined

29:00 with sandbags and some overhead cover. Wouldn't have stopped a five hundred pound bomb. And looking back, the last place you want to be is near a railway line or a railway station. So they were the first and I assume they were built there for people shopping that could immediately go into those areas. The schools had their own and I mentioned before that we had to dig our own, help dig them, that was fun for youngsters, different.

29:30 **So one for each kid?**

No they were zigzag trenches, what we used to call crawl trenches in the military. Just a line of trenches zigzagged all around and you would just go and get in. Probably about four feet deep I suppose.

Were they out in the open or under the cover of trees?

Out in the open. They would have been in between trees but the bottom line was

30:00 the school teachers and the department of education had obviously been told you are to provide air-raid shelters, or crawl trenches or slit trenches for the children, and with their background of education they probably had no idea of dispersion, and camouflage or deception and we had these trenches.

30:30 The third type of air-raid shelter was the one in your back yard. Most people had an air-raid shelter in the back yard, which when you look back was very primitive, would have been very ineffective.

I have heard in the bigger cities there was inspectors who would come around, did you have those?

No I can't remember any of that, if there was ever a trauma that came out of World War II for me was about 1942 they introduced

31:00 "Buy a Stamp," saving stamps, and of course Mum would always give us threepence a month or something, which was a fair bit of money for her. You would get this little stamp in your coupon, doing your little bit or you would go around picking up scrap heap iron and so forth for the war effort. I can remember they brought out this card and it had a photograph of this very primitive biplane

31:30 with two wings flying through the air, and this character of a Japanese pilot leaning out of the cockpit

with a bomb in his hand about to drop it. He had big thick glasses, which was typical in those days you know, the Japanese myopic and all of this sort of stuff, and with big prominent buck teeth and the poem went, here I am sixty-nine I can still tell you, “Georgie Jap is flying high, dropping bombs to make us cry,

32:00 buy a bomb today, and Georgie Jap will fly away.” Now that was very emotive, but my name was George and I got very upset that I was being identified with one of these bloody Japanese and I was very upset, very angry about that. It didn’t take long for your peer group to pick it up and it became a teasing point.

Did you have to get into a biff [fight] with anyone over it?

Oh yeah well biffing

32:30 was normal in those days. It was a question of your own prestige, honour, and survival at the time.

I have heard a lot of guys learnt to box when they were young?

I was taught to box by one of my uncles and I can recall in 1946 just after the war, I would have been about eleven,

33:00 there was a dispute and the headmaster pulled out the gloves, between me and this other bloke. And he was much bigger than me but this was the way the headmaster was sorting it out. The fight was during recess or play time or whatever. I was fortunate, he had greater length and size than me, but I was fortunate that I had

33:30 already been given a few lessons from my uncle a few years before, a reasonable amount of lessons. Anyway I just went in on the attack, I can always remember my uncle saying, it is an army maxim as well, the best form of defence is attack. And that was my first lesson of it and I just

34:00 went for it. A few jabs and he obviously had never understood or been taught anything about boxing, and so I beat him like a dinner and I became the school hero because I was much smaller, I took a while to sprout up.

Would have been a huge boost to your confidence as a young guy?

Fortunately that’s all it did, it just made me confident when I was with others, certainly fortunately

34:30 I didn’t take advantage of it and suddenly become a bully and I can say that in all honesty.

You mentioned the Americans, I just wondered as young kids what your impressions of them were?

They had a lot of chewing gum, they were obviously very rich, they threw money around. We knew that

35:00 obviously they were allies and we knew from just the general atmosphere and conversations with our families and the mothers and so forth in the street, it was a great thing, and we could see that by the number of aircraft that were flying over us, and going into the airstrips and stuff.

What did you like ever follow them and see what they were up to? Did you have a curiosity about them as kids?

35:30 I don’t think so. I think we had become immune to it, it was part of our life to see soldiers and aircraft around. Mind you, when you compare our growing up in Australia, to a Chinese kid in Peking or a Japanese kid in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, or a German in Berlin or Dusseldorf, or a Pommie [English person] that was in, you notice the

36:00 the difference as soon as I talk about the Brits, the Pommie in the London Blitz, the Jew who was in Europe, the young kid. We were very lucky and I think that’s what makes our country so special.

So what was your first job as a kid?

The first thing that comes to mind apart from the chores was going around and

36:30 collecting manure and selling it to the ladies of the house for their gardens. Getting sixpence a big bag. I remember that. Second job was selling newspapers outside the pub. Help Mum with the income because we were not a rich family by any means and army pay wasn’t that good, well we know it wasn’t that good. I used to sell

37:00 papers outside the pub and give Mum the money.

Do you remember what a newspaper sold for?

Threepence, tuppence I am not sure about that. It was around that, only a small amount anyway.

Were you a good spruiker, did you have to yell stuff out?

Yeah, “Get your paper! Get your paper! Aussies land here, this or that. Get your paper!”

37:30 **And what about after you took telegrams around, or you worked for the post office or something?**

I was a junior postal officer, a JPO, which meant you were a telegram boy. And I was doing that, I sat for my

38:00 examinations when the year I left school 1949 and of course in those days if you wanted to go on from there you had to belong to a very affluent family and we certainly didn't have the money to pursue my education. So I got a job, and I had been very successful in the examinations and Mum was very proud of all of this and her eldest was about to become somebody in the post office. And I shattered all of that on my seventeenth

38:30 birthday by joining the army. While I was a junior postal officer, that was the very basic phase of advancement in the post office in them days. So I used to travel two nights to Perth to learn Morse code and wireless which was part of the development.

How would you get to Perth?

On a bus.

39:00 **You were learning Morse code that would have been quite a big deal for you then, do you recall any specifics of how you were taught ?**

I can recite Morse code to you right now. 'Dit dah dah dit dit dit', that's A, B. C is 'dah di dah dit'. D is 'da dit dit'. E is 'dit'. F is 'di di dah dit'.

39:30 So it goes on.

Did you practise at home or anything like that?

That was part of the deal. When I joined up, as I said I was probably sending and receiving at about twenty words a minute, twenty-three and from memory the expert was about twenty-five so I was nearly there. It

40:00 came in handy later in military life. It's still there now. I can send Morse code if I have to. Without even thinking about it, receiving it, it would have to be slow for me to get it.

Tape 2

00:30 **So when you were delivering telegrams that must have been a bit sad at times?**

No that was after the war of course. That was 1950. So the war was five years over by then, Korean War was just about to start.

So how long did you stay at the post office?

01:00 A year fifteen months. About fifteen months.

And then you decided you would join up did you?

Well it was a mass decision, there was about eight of us, began with the idea from school and six of us decided to join up, we were all seventeen. We made the local headlines in the West Australian, 'Youth continue school association' and

01:30 there was a photograph. And so we all joined up, and I was the youngest, so they waited until my seventeenth birthday and we joined on my seventeenth birthday.

And what was driving you all to join up?

Korean War.

Was it patriotic, was it an adventure?

The Korean War had started and in those days it was not unusual for the youngsters to step forward and join up.

02:00 That was basically it, and the reality that, it doesn't matter whether it be the ANZACs [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] or whatever, there is also that challenge and sense of adventure and so forth that all young males are stupid enough to have in the back of their brain.

Can you just go back to the end of World War II, and can you talk about hearing the war was over and the impact that had?

02:30 I remember that well. We were at school, or was it the day after? Anyway we were all put out on the parade ground, in those days we had parade grounds. And the headmaster told us the war was over and they were going to celebrate and so forth.

03:00 My first indication was my sister writing in her diary and reading it out to me that they had just dropped a big bomb. We didn't comprehend, It had been dropped somewhere in the Pacific and about a week later we heard that the other one had been dropped. And the news was instantaneous, it was like an epidemic

03:30 through the whole suburb and everyone just gathered like moths to a light in the shopping area of Bassendean. On our way down there there was a troop train going past from the eastern states and they were all shouting and waving and we waved back. I remember that. And I also remember Victory over Europe Day [VE Day – Victory in Europe], when that

04:00 happened, that might have been when the headmaster pulled us out I can't remember. But I remember me and my mates, some of those that joined up with me, we grabbed all of these old kerosene tins and we ran up and down the Main Street of Bassendean shopping centre beating them. They probably would have told us to, "Bugger off!" I suppose, but everyone was too happy to worry about it.

04:30 It was very much, the celebrations went on and on. And then there was the aftermath of that in that people started to come home, uncles and Dad and so forth. And I can remember as early as 1947, again shortly after the war,

05:00 Olive my elder sister she would have been about seventeen, eighteen going out with this soldier with one leg who had lost it in Singapore. He had just been released obviously. And he was still on a crutch. There was the impact of the war, with your own family, suddenly your sister is going out with a bloke with one leg.

05:30 Later on, when he left the scene, another fellow came along and he was the fellow she eventually married, he was still in uniform. He had been serving on HMAS Warramunga for the entire Japanese War, from 1941 right through to '45, he was obviously very young when he joined up. But he was still in uniform and he suddenly became our hero.

06:00 So there was that, and then the uncles started coming back. And the one thing we never missed out on and it was part of the society of that time, was that Christmas religiously was always at out grandparents' place down in a place called Garrett Road right down next to the bridge, he was an old fisherman. And they had a pretty large big block of land, the new bridge now goes over it, they resumed

06:30 the land later on in our life. And that's where we had our Christmas and grandma would come out with the puddings that they would put in the old hessian bags and leave them and they would all have the old threepences and sixpences in. And the cousins, we were only kids. They maintained that throughout the war. And again there was the absence because a lot of the uncles weren't there, They were either in the army, navy, air force.

07:00 They had gone.

What was it like suddenly having men back in the town and for you as a young boy suddenly having your father present again?

I don't know. I mean Dad, as I said, was very reticent. I never got close to Dad. There was very little communication, I would go out chopping wood for him in the scrub and that to get

07:30 wood for the fire. I probably had more rapport with my uncles who were much younger. When I say younger, they were obviously in their early twenties and had just come home and I identified well with them. It was just one of those things, it never made

08:00 the impact on me that it did when I saw my mother crying with war, W A R. And to this day I have often wondered how come I could spell war at that stage. And I thought if I couldn't spell it I can still recall that photographic memory of W A R there., Maybe I picked that up later on in life, but it was there just these three letters. So to answer your question with my uncles and men,

08:30 there was a degree of change in the street because looking back I didn't appreciate it at the time, we were probably sad because there were some that didn't come back. But most of my mates, one's father had been taken prisoner in the Middle East, he knew it because his mother had been given a telegram to say he was captured.

09:00 So he knew his father was alive, but always wondering day to day whether he was still alive. So I can still see him coming home. But other than that I think it was just an adjustment. And of course the other thing that kids have, not that I am an expert in it. There is that defence mechanism, "Right oh, the

09:30 war is over, right oh what's next?" I was eleven when the war finished, so it was a question of getting to an age then when nothing else mattered but going down and seeing who could dive from a higher height from the bridge into the river or a shallow area, or the dares that challenge young kids-

10:00 going camping out bush with your mates, they all took priority. And as you got older into adolescence suddenly you started that these sheilas [girls] weren't bad looking things after all.

Do you recall your first girlfriend?

No I was just about due for the

10:30 priesthood or something because, no I didn't have any girlfriends. And I admired a couple of them but there was no sexual inferences, it was just growing up, and even after I joined the army. Maybe because I was too busy with my mates doing things. But I look back now on my youth and

11:00 whenever I got to the RSL [Returned and Services League] and see all of these young blokes getting together having a beer I'd say, "You silly buggers, you should be out there chasing sheilas, you're wasting all of that valuable time." But I suppose mateship hasn't changed.

I was just wondering since you were a bit closer to your uncles spending time with them, did you ever ask them anything about their war experiences, even some of the lighter side, at all?

11:30 No, the closest I ever got, Uncle Bill saying to me once, I found it very amusing because I have used it a couple of times since, actually. He was there and this bloke was saying to him and officer apparently came up and said, "Stop smoking!" and he said, "I am not smoking."

12:00 And he said, "But you have got your pipe in your mouth." And he said, "I have. I have also got my boots on but I am not walking!." Yeah. Doesn't work though, I tried the trick several years later, a sergeant told me to stop smoking, I said a similar thing, really saying the cigarette hadn't been lit. I found out that sergeants don't have a sense of humour.

12:30 **And what can you tell me of Anzac Day after the war had finished, do you have any strong memories of Anzac Day?**

None at all. I can remember Anzac Day at school and Remembrance Day at school, but I don't honestly recall it within our suburbs, because I never went to them.

13:00 Nor did any of our family. In fact oddly enough, even when I was in the army, I was never associated with Anzac Day. I never marched until probably 1990, like about fourteen years ago.

13:30 **What was the change that you decided to start marching?**

Well it wasn't anybody raising the flag and suddenly beating my chest in pride. Nobody had to do that, I loved the flag as a kid, which is another interesting observation. I think that because of my

14:00 involvement with the military, Anzac Day was another parade, it was a day off, so why go unless I was part of it? And now I am talking about when I was soldier going through the ranks and so forth. When you go through the ranks you suddenly have commitments because you're obliged to make an address or whatever, but to get involved with Anzac Day and to see all of my mates in 1990 I

14:30 think it was simply because I was associated with all of my mates in the military for all of those years. Anzac Day was something to me that I didn't need. It could be spent with my family.

When you decided to join up, what was your mother's reaction?

Broken hearted. She saw as I said every mother sees her son being the prime minister or millionaire or whatever,

15:00 and I topped this examination and I was obviously going to, according to her, do very well in life and suddenly there was the papers for her to sign. Which she signed. Because she obviously knew me, I would have been disappointed if she hadn't, and I would have simply waited until I was eighteen to sign up anyway, and so she signed.

15:30 **So did you tell her before you ended up in the local paper?**

Oh yes, I had to because I had to have her authorisation to join up.

So talk me through your basic training – where you were, and what you did?

Well before that of course I joined the Citizens' Military Forces at the age of sixteen.

16:00 Put my age up and so I gained a bit of a background to the military side of it when I joined up. But I did my recruit training as a private soldier with my mates in a place called Guilford, the same place where the fish and chip shop was and the air-raid shelters. That was the recruit training centre in those days, each side had its own. There has been drastic changes to military training since then, it is all centralised. But in those days each

16:30 state had its own recruit training centre. The comparison between our training centre and Gomer Pyle [US TV comedy show] or these American movies you see on the marine trainings and Full Metal Jacket and all of these other movies, there is no comparison. Ours was far more sensible,

17:00 far more mature, far more constructive and certainly none of that nonsense, at all. I didn't find it tough, it was hard. It was demanding, but it wasn't torture and it certainly wasn't as people make it out to be. And even the comparison then to the modern armed forces, and sometimes I

17:30 see it on TV you know people yelling and shouting and screaming at somebody that far away from their nose. Well it wouldn't have happened in our time, somebody would have got fitted [hit]. Because, well it

is true, in fact I don't know how these officers get away with it now and it serves no purpose. There was a far better psychological approach in those days, it was very tough, very demanding,

18:00 there were no excuses. I can remember a whole platoon of thirty people lived in the one hut bed after bed, so if one person got a cold everyone got it and so on. On day one, if there was a need for twelve inoculations you got your twelve and in those days in the next morning they would drill you because that would get

18:30 the arms moving, because they were like lead. There was a rumour, and I am sure it happened because the tea never tasted the same, because we were all young and virile and oversexed, they fed us bromide in the tea which distracts you from chasing young ladies. And so we were all convinced this bromide

19:00 was there. After a while you didn't drink tea or you did so you accepted it. It was certainly a very interesting phase of life, the military then and now, there is no question about that certainly in the Australian Army, certainly developed confidence, esteem and comradeship. The very basic understanding of comradeship, it was very clever,

19:30 it was forced onto you. I don't know that they knew what they were doing but they forced onto this mateship and everything else and the ethos and the ethics that were very easy to accept and pursue. And thieving, you could leave your wallet on your mattress, nobody would touch it., And people would say why? Well later on in life if you only had half a bottle of water and you

20:00 you were out and that's all you had, you would share it, but that was your water. And so if and when we found the thief, when I say we I am talking about the older soldiers, I was still an infant really, I just followed the mob, and there was incidences of it and the thief was found and that thief was given barrack room justice before the system got hold of him.

20:30 He would be belted, the old run through a line of web belts and so on, and banished. Never to come back, not even to pick up his gear, and the system would wake up to it and he would be grabbed and moved off. Very harsh justice. And one could argue that it wasn't a smart way to do business because there was always the possibility of someone who was innocent being involved in that caper, but soldiers have a way of

21:00 knowing. Fights, they were common in those days, like the fight I was talking about at school. If there was a difference of opinion between two people there would be a ring of soldiers and they would settle it. Hence the 'mad galahs' mentioned. They would settle it and the other thing in those days, there were no knives, no knuckle

21:30 dusters [weapons]. It was a test of your manhood so to speak, it was fist or nothing at all. And if anyone put the boot in [kicked] when you were down it wouldn't matter who he was, that was the worst thing you could do, putting the boot into someone. Which is a vast change from today's society, they use baseball bats and so forth. You really wonder how it all happened, this transformation from brutality to brutality without any honour.

22:00 So that's recruit training. I can remember an officer there who was a very good officer who lost a leg in Korea. Another one who became a prisoner of war. I can still see one of my favourite NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]and I have been asked on many occasions to speak publicly at reunions and so forth and he is one of the few fellows that I never forget,

22:30 Wally Ogleby, he was a corporal. Wally Ogleby was a World War II veteran. He fought in El Alamein and the Middle East and the South West Pacific. He had already been to Korea, he went to the Korea with the first group, the real tough ones and spent the first winter of Korea in summer dress. Basically they had to steal to stay alive in the below zero temperatures.

23:00 He was at the Battle of Kap'yong and so on. Anyway he was posted to recruit training, he obviously identified me as a bloke who needed a bit of help, and he gave it to me. The first lesson he gave me, we used to do a lot of bayonet fighting, that was the infantry in those days, it was just as much bayonet fighting as shooting on the range

23:30 or throwing grenades. And other tactics, whenever there was time when other people would be in the canteen he decided I was too young for that. I was very young like a baby, so he would take me down the back and make me do more bayonet training and unarmed combat to the point where at the end of the three months I was very good at it and I could take him on and he

24:00 would come at me with his rifle and bayonet there, and I would take it off him. That gave me immense confidence and it built me up too. I was a bit of a weed [skinny]. And the other thing he taught me which I have often quoted. If I go down to the military college, I am invited down there often in recent times. I only just got back a

24:30 couple of weeks ago to talk to the graduating officers who are leaving which is a great honour, because I never went through the military college. Ogleby once said to me, and I was only talking about it the other day, that as a young bloke I was mouthing off about officers saying, "Why do we need officers?" and Wally Ogleby pulled me out of the line and said to me, "I will tell you why, because officers are there to lead and your job is to follow. Now you get off your arse and

25:00 start learning how to do just that." Never forgotten it. Great bloke. So they are the visions I have of recruit training.

What sort of exercises, or can you remember

25:30 **specific things, where you felt like you were gelling [melding together] as a unit?**

Well the first place where you would do that, would be on the parade ground where you would be doing drill and the fact that you were working as a team keeping in step. We had just been in civilian street, they were great achievements.

26:00 And it developed team pride, collective pride. The fact that if your barracks weren't clean, if there was one bed out of place it was that one bed, the whole barracks would be required to do it again that night or whatever. If the barracks weren't spotless, and there were three or four errors involving people, you would all do it again.

26:30 That was their own subtle way of saying, "Get your act together." Because you can't go different ways, everyone has got to pull together, you're a team. And it was that approach, to the point when those rare occasion when you went on leave, I suspect it was deliberate, in that town you can only go to that pub or that pub.

27:00 And there were other reasons, maybe the other pub had a bad reputation or whatever, but it forced people together socially. The canteen was together from eight thirty to ten o'clock at night, forcing people together, you didn't have a choice, you didn't go anywhere else. And so even your social entertainment and activities, you sing songs, concerts you all had to produce. And so by the time

27:30 you left, you were still green by the time you left your three months recruit training, but the difference was you had developed a lot of confidence, you certainly had pride and you had established a great rapport with other people and you understood the values of other people, tolerance and so forth. And I go back to the earlier point I made, if you walked into the army as a bigot in any sense of

28:00 the word you weren't going to survive if you persisted in that bigotry. And it might shock you that later on in life, even homosexuals. I have served alongside homosexuals and they were great mates. But they knew the rules, these particular people, they didn't try to practise these activities in the group. What they did outside, didn't condone it, never encouraged it, but what they did, just

28:30 shut a blind eye but never inside, as opposed to those that did and there was the subtle difference. So recruit training was very much an important stepping stone for the soldiers. And even in those days, if you didn't confidently make that stepping stone you were out, you didn't get past recruit training.

So let's move on now, after recruit training what is next for you?

29:00 I went to Puckapunyal in 1951 to the 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. The barracks were very primitive, they were World War II barracks, they had never been maintained, they had never been improved, there was four of us to a

29:30 room in a small area. No windows. So the more enterprising would put brown paper up to keep the wind out., some of those who had gone to Korea before us had belted holes in them, maybe before that, maybe the Middle East, and the wind used to whistle through and in summer there was the hot dust. Extreme temperatures and in winter you froze. And you

30:00 would go out into the scrub, Tallarook Ranges was a favourite. And we had World War I rifles, that was no surprise, and we had 303 rifles and we had World War I American pup tents which leaked, they were the ones you carried on your back. We had World War I gas masks, which were a ground sheet that you laid on,

30:30 rubbery ones and they had lost all of their warmth and protection against the cold and moisture. And so we carried our greatcoats, big army greatcoats in those days. And the big army greatcoat was a great sponge of water, so whenever you got wet you're suddenly carrying three times as much as weight in water, and when it got wet it got wet. So literally, you were like a mule carrying all of this stuff around.

31:00 The difference between then and now is immense, with modern science and technology and equipment.

Did you just accept that this is what you were getting or even then did the young fellows think "oh gee this is a bit rough?"

We just accepted it. There was no question about it and I guess it is like the theory of the buffalo, the weak are sorted out. There weren't many weak ones at Puckapunyal,

31:30 the training was very harsh, very severe in that in two weeks we lost three people killed, nobody even blinked an eye in the hierarchy. We just got on with it. In today's army there would be a national stoppage while they checked out to see why that happened.

Do you say you lost three people in training?

Yes dead, killed, stopped breathing.

How did that happen?

32:00 Well two were killed in a mortar explosion, they were firing a mortar which is a bomb down a steel tube and it blew up on them, faulty ammunition, so it killed two of them. Part of the training in those days, because communication was poor, we were using World War II walkie-talkies [mobile radios] which had a range of about two or three hundred metres, so there was still a reliance

32:30 on runners and of course the runner system meant that you had to train as to the importance of it. And you would get a message, and from there you have to go about another thousand yards along this creek bed, along the hill and down the hill, and report to battalion headquarters. And you had to give them a verbal message that your company was under attack and you needed thirty thousand rounds of .303 ammunition and

33:00 five thousand rounds of nine millimetre, and two hundred and seventy three grenades, and that there had been fifty-five people wounded and so forth, go! And you go you are going under wire and up ropes and through creeks and people firing over your head with machine guns and loud explosions and when you get to the end if you haven't got the message right you have to go back and do it again.

33:30 And it was going through the wire, the machine gun firing overhead for whatever reason, ricochet came and cleaned up one of the fellows, shot him through the head. So that was three. And there was another, we were seventeen years of age and

34:00 I can remember in recruit training going back and Ogleby and others would say, "This is the M36 grenade," that was the old pineapple grenade where you would have to unscrew it, put the fuse in screw it up again and then you had four seconds after you pulled the pin and let the lever fly [before it exploded]. And he would say, "This is the M36 grenade, got a very good lethal range in confined areas. Kill anything in

34:30 confined areas. It has got forty-eight squares on it which, when it explodes, will fragment into forty-eight pieces, plus the base plug plus the clip. It has a lethal range on hard ground of one hundred and ten metres and on soft ground seventy-five metres." And I

35:00 assume the difference being on soft ground the shrapnel embedded into the mud and wouldn't ricochet. And I used to say to myself, "I can't even throw the grenade that far." That was my first reaction. We did it from trenches over the head and out in the open and you would just get down in your little fox hole or fighting pit. Well at Puckapunyal we advanced to the next step where you would be out in the open and

35:30 you would be crawling along and you would throw the grenade out in the open at a target in front, which was a small trench. Now if the grenade didn't go into the trench and stayed in the open and you're in the open, then you would really have to hug the ground. And they were very clever because if you do that, chances are you are not going to get any impact at all from the grenade. Which was another subtle way of telling you how well

36:00 you could use grenades, that you mastered them. Anyway this particular day we were out there and we got to the next step of throwing two grenades at once.

Do you do that with one hand?

No two grenades, two blokes, both throw grenades at once. Simultaneously. And of course what happened one grenade went off and one grenade blew back. And went off in between.

36:30 One bloke was wounded in one side of his leg and the other bloke lost his leg. Of course I was there and smoking, I was smoking in those days and I suddenly decided I needed to smoke about eight cigarettes at once. But this is the army,

37:00 you see. The sergeant had been wounded and the warrant officer company sergeant major took over and he said, "Right Mansford, grab your grenades." "But I have already thrown." "Just grab your grenades." I went back out He knew I had to re-establish confidence. Now you could argue today and rightly so, they would stop the practice to find out what the problem was.

37:30 And the problem was pretty obvious – you don't throw two grenades at once. Incidentally I saw that happen and immediately realised the problem and was in a position to stop it for future times. And so I went out and repeated the whole process. There was no investigation. As soon as the ambulance was out of the area, whistle blast, "Get on with it!" I keep saying to these young blokes at military college, this was counselling as it was in those days.

38:00 Nobody was sitting you down saying, "Now how do you feel son? That was sad." This was, "Get on with it." And quite frankly that is the only way to counsel soldiers under those circumstances. It is a pretty tough profession, no used feeling sorry for yourself, you have got to get on with it.

As difficult as it would have been losing three people at Puckapunyal did that prepare you further on, you would have learnt quickly at close range that you're doing a dangerous job?

38:30 Yeah. Well it was a dangerous job. And the bottom line is that it was accepted. I mean and maybe that was because we had already been exposed to some of the

39:00 periphery of World War II. Mind you, most of the people I soldiered with in those days were already World War II veterans. My corporal was an ex-bomber pilot who had won the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] in bombing raids over Europe and joined up for Korea; he wanted to go again, couldn't settle down to civvie street [civilian life] see?

39:30 And I suspect he had already been divorced by his wife, that's the other side of the story. The girls had to put up with a lot. His 2IC [Second in Command] a lance corporal as most of them had had been in El Alamein and the South West Pacific and a couple have even been to Korea. And here I am, a seventeen year old, their average age was twenty-five to thirty and here I am half way between

40:00 seventeen and eighteen. And they really protected me, I mean later on in life when a couple of them were alive, they have gone now, but they had immense pride in that Georgie made brigadier you know. Brigadier Georgie is a one-star general. Immense pride. And these were the rough and tumble blokes, the cutting edge of our infantry

40:30 corps in World War II and a bomber pilot for World War II and so when we would go down to Melbourne we would go on a troop train, there would be a troop train down there maybe once every four to six weeks because there was no leave, you didn't go out of the gates when you wanted, you only went on leave when the army told you to.

Tape 3

00:30 It was quite an interesting experience because you're talking about young men, pretty wild,

01:00 although disciplined suddenly out of the clutches of the military but all in uniform and free for a little while. We would all end up at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and the Salvation Army would look after us. Soldiers never had allowances to go and live in a hotel or whatever, so we would all sleep on the stretchers and quite frankly from there we would all go and get drunk or chase sheilas. And occasionally,

01:30 and this was the mateship again, we would come under threat from some in the civilian community and we would all gather as a clan to make sure our blokes were protected. So the Melbournites were more than happy to see us get back on the troop train Sunday night and go back. And there would be many who were AWL [Absent Without Leave]. But the point I was making before, that section that I belonged

02:00 to, they still had me in a monastery. I would go into the pub with them and they would let me have one beer, two beers at the most and then tell me to 'bugger off' [go away] and I would have to go to the movies or something while they got drunk and did whatever they were going to do over the weekend. It was their way of looking after me, and it is quite interesting to look back and see the

02:30 protection these blokes did offer to the minors so to speak.

Did you take that on the chin happily, I imagine you would have been ticked off?

I was ticked off [angry] but there was nothing much I could do about it. That was their law and I was not going to dispute it. They were all pretty impressive young men to me, they already had a row and a half of ribbons and here I was a clean skin.

03:00 **And who were the threats from the general public?**

Well you had them, the bodgies I think was the term in those days.

What's a bodgie?

A bodgie and the widgie. The bodgies were the blokes that would have the chains around their necks and the crew cuts and all sorts of things.

03:30 Each generation had a different name for them. They were the blokes with the motorbikes that would hang around the milk bars and sniff the glue or whatever. Every generation had them and they were always very adept at getting out the loose stragglers so to speak.

Can I ask you about the general public's response to servicemen at that stage, had the goodwill from World War II carried on?

04:00 It was increasingly different. I mean in our days in 1951, you would get on a tram and not pay, we could send a letter home and not pay. Not pay postage, just armed forces. And if you walked into a pub there was a significant number of old diggers who would welcome you and buy you a beer and so forth. And so it was there, the other side of the coin was though

04:30 that you had a community that was indifferent. Indifferent to emotion, indifferent to circumstances and probably very wary of war. You're talking about a nation that this is only half way through the century, and they have already been involved in two big wars in a big way, and then Korea. And there are a few blokes that are pretty critical

05:00 about the fact that it is the forgotten war, and in many ways it was, but the other reality is that there was an indifference, it was just simply an extension of World War I1 on a smaller scale, hence if you got three people killed in a couple of weeks training that probably might not even make the [news]paper and if it did it would be page 10. “So what? That’s not as many as we were losing four or five years ago.”

05:30 As I say with Korea it’s just another war, whereas by the time Vietnam came there had been a relatively big gap. And of course you also had the emotions of conscripts, the young twenty year olds being dragged away from home, which is another story.

Can I ask you with Korea, what sort of news were you getting back via the media about what was going on?

06:00 Pretty current but not like today’s society where you have got immediate phones, mobiles and faxes and TV cameras with satellites, and so forth. There was a delay probably of four days or so forth, but it was not instant, not just hours, nothing like that. But it was coming through on the news

06:30 reels, [cinema] it was coming through on radio, it was coming through in the papers. Then again there probably wasn’t a great deal of coverage. I mean there probably would have been a lot of Australians surprised at that time to know that there was even Australians over there.

How aware of the politics were you as an individual?

Oh what sort of politics?

The politics of the Korean War, the spread of communism, why Australia was fighting there?

07:00 I think most young Australians certainly that I am aware of my associates, we were well read. You’re talking about a generation that was encouraged to read, you’re talking about a generation that had that need to read. Because there was no idiot box [TV] and the movies were once a week or whatever, and so the radio around the camp fire or whatever the venues were, was a very important part of social life at that time and reading was part of it.

07:30 Every soldier had a book in his pack, I would be interested to find out how many have got them now. So we were well informed and we knew as a general rule, there would be exceptions, but generally we understood, we understood the official line too I might add, about the threat of communism.

08:00 And no matter what they argue later in life, the threat of communism in1951 was real. You had Russia on the march and North Korea invading the South and China supporting them, and you already had Vietnam, the first Indochina war was on and even in Malaya it was on; in fact

08:30 Malaya was nearly about to fall. It didn’t, but it was nearly about to fall to the communist insurgents. Australians didn’t know about Malaya, well we vaguely knew about it, but we certainly knew about Korea and we knew why. It was a direct aggression by North Korea, there is no doubt about that.

Was stopping communism high on your personal agenda? Did it get that lofty or

09:00 **was it?**

Yes it was. I mean it was all about our beaut country of Oz [Australia]. I guess there might have been a bigotry there too, the bastards in South-East Asia or wherever, be it justified or not, there was a definite

09:30 intent. That’s why we were serving, as well as what I said, the adventure. But yes it was there.

You had served to go to Korea, at Puckapunyal were you getting itchy feet [restless], were you keen to get over there?

At that stage our battalion was the re-enforcement battalion and I was only

10:00 seventeen and you had to be eighteen and nine months to go, so I had time to wait. And my only fear was as it turned out the battalion would be earmarked and I wouldn’t go and that’s exactly what happened in that particular phase. So I mean, no we were quite philosophical about it. And I mean it goes back to the training, “Old

10:30 Billy Bloggs lost his leg, well that’s tough. Here is a drink to Old Billy Bloggs!” It was a good way of introducing you to the realities of war and your profession. If the military college is listening and all of those do-gooders in Canberra are listening, that’s the only bloody way to train soldiers, you don’t do it with counsellors.

11:00 The RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] is the counsellor, the sergeant major is the counsellor, and if they are not good counsellors you get rid of them.

It is an important part of leadership?

Absolutely yes. Having said that I think there has been terrible neglect in the past using that term counselling, the youngster that came home from Korea and Malaya and

11:30 Vietnam and Borneo and elsewhere, but more so Vietnam, I isolate that and I know you want to talk about that later. But more so there, because there you had a group of young men who were not professionals. They acted as professionals and they were excellent soldiers, superb but their mind was elsewhere if you

12:00 like because they were there for two years. They were your bank clerks, mechanics all walks of life who had been dragged away for two years and when they came back they suddenly found themselves back in their old bank job, whereas the week before they had been in the army, the week before that they had been in Vietnam. Very difficult. There was no faster transformation

12:30 from warrior to civilian that the Vietnam War, with the conscripts.

Did you think you had an eye to the army as a career at that early stage?

My parents had drummed into us, and me particular being the eldest boy, because they were victims of the Depression and they had experienced it and it was a common theme,

13:00 not just with my parents, but my aunties, uncles, grandparents, the ladies down the road, school teachers, you have got to get a good guaranteed job like in the commonwealth, a government job. Put your money in the bank and save, save, save. It was all to do with their experience in the Great Depression. Government jobs indicated

13:30 security, banking jobs indicated something to fall back on. And I mean they were quite obsessed with it and rightly so, that was their experience.

But the military wasn't seen as a secure career then, I mean it was later on?

No well that wasn't the question. I didn't say I followed them. The parents and so forth that was their view and

14:00 my view, well to start with I was young and immortal and money meant nothing, you know life was going to go on anyway, and the military was there, and there was a need to serve and I think that was the question wasn't it?

We were talking about Vietnam and guys who were pulled out of day to day life and returned to it?

14:30 Well initially I followed the advice of my parents and others about getting a government job and secure, but when Korea came up and my mates turned around, it was a dear old mate of mine who said, "Well, let's join up." I said "If they're joining up I have got to join up too." And that was the distraction from the government job and that again was the horror

15:00 that my mother now widow wasn't very happy about. Not only was I not going to have a government job, I mean the army was a government job, but not in the true sense.

You talked about the bonding that took place in your initial training and at Puckapunyal, how did your day to day duties

15:30 **fit into the overall structure, what was your job and how did it fit in?**

At recruit training?

No at Puckapunyal?

Well I mean my day to day job, we were still being trained, so my day to day job was basically a rifleman. Whatever a rifleman did, we used to do. And again 'mad galahs' – there was one part of our training where we marched for day after

16:00 day with very little water, discipline, in those days you didn't drink when you wanted to drink, you drank when you were told to drink. There was a very good reason for it because nobody knew where the next water was coming from. Anyway we finally arrived on this God forsaken barren hill and the commanding officer of the company, company commander a fellow named Reg Saunders,

16:30 first Aboriginal officer, great soldier, another one who taught me a lot. He said, "Right dig in and in three hours time there will be tanks coming over and attacking the hill." So we're thinking, "This bloke has gone off his rocker," [mad]. And I noticed with interest some of the older fellows who had done it before, digging at a pretty good pace. So I dug too because I was also the officer's batman, I was his orderly, the runner and so forth and so I also had to dig his share

17:00 of my trench, because he was elsewhere. It was pretty hard digging at Puckapunyal with all rocky and cold and so forth, so I was digging furiously and sure enough at the required time we heard the clatter of tanks and they appeared on the horizon over the crest of the hill. Old Reg Saunders said, "You have got five minutes. "And then people realised he was fair dinkum and the dirt came out faster and faster.

17:30 And then he blew a whistle, everyone in their trenches, and then the tanks commenced firing at us with live ammunition. Yeah. This was called tank inoculation. Not only did they do that then of course they were firing the machine guns and not getting a high explosive and the young platoon commander, he

was the fellow I was sharing the trench with, he was in the

18:00 trench and I fell on top of him and of course we didn't have much room for moving. Anyway the machine gun started and you could hear rounds [shells] hitting around the top of the trench, perfectly safe when you think about it. Anyway he said, "I have got a cramp Reg, you will have to move." And this was the first time I ever swore at an officer, I said, "You can get stuffed." But I was not that polite actually. "I am not moving." So he

18:30 is at the bottom of the trench with his face down on the sweet smelling earth and I am on top of him. Sort of a homosexual embrace really and I wasn't moving. and then the tanks arrived and they didn't stop they ran over us, the tanks actually came over the trenches. And it was quite an experience you could feel the trench contracting with the weight

19:00 pushing it in. And I am not sure if it was him screaming or me. Anyway the tank went over, they weren't firing obviously at that stage. And I put my head up and behind them were coming two young, well two old diggers [soldiers] cigarette hanging out, typical digger really, and they were carrying shovels and they would say, "Here is one over here Fred." And there would be a trench that had fallen in and they would start digging and pull the blokes out. And that was our tank inoculation, compliments of

19:30 Captain Reg Saunders. I don't bother telling it at the military college because I don't think people believe me. It's true. And the idea of it was to show simply that infantry can fight tanks if you're dug in. you let them go past you and get them from the rear. And when I look back that was obviously part of the technique that they used in the Western Desert, you

20:00 know the 9th Division at Tobruk and El Alamein. And in our section there were people very much experienced in that, so to them it was old hat [old fashioned] and they were the ones that were digging pretty fast. I took my queue from the old soldiers, never question an old soldier, whatever you see an old soldier do, you do.

And I guess a pretty significant part of that training is just that you take all of your training seriously, you never know when you are going to be under threat?

20:30 Training for war is as hard as it gets, and it has got to be as realistic as it can be, because that's what saves lives. And if you take shortcuts because, are you listening Canberra? If it is too hot or cold or the soldiers are tired you

21:00 are not going to train them properly and then you are not training them for war. And then if you don't prepare them for war you are going to take casualties, more casualties that you should do, and that's a fact of life.

Was Puckapunyal an appropriate training ground in terms of weather and conditions?

For Korea? Well I couldn't think of a more colder mongrel place, I mean Korea was cold, I mean I used to cry with the cold in Korea. At different times, different circumstances, I mean it was bloody cold.

21:30 And the army in its wisdom, I mean it wasn't the only place they had – Ingleburn but that too I mean in winter, it is not exactly correct. But the army had a way of doing it, and the government re-enforced that so if you get a place like Puckapunyal and Tallarook Ranges where you are getting a slight misty rain twenty four hours a day which then leaves you saturated, and the temperature might not be below zero, but close enough to it.

22:00 The army has been very clever and the government is supporting them in that because they don't issue you with warm clothing. They were still issuing us with the khaki drill that was used in the Middle East. It was an appropriate place to train, hate the place, but it was an appropriate place to train.

And can one adapt to the cold, to surviving in the cold?

You have got to.

Does it get easier?

22:30 Well it doesn't get easier but you can adapt or tolerate it if you have been trained, disciplined. I mean if you look at the casualty rate of the Americans as prisoners of war, their fatality rate while prisoners of war was huge. If you look at the Turks it was negligible, they were both exposed to the same privations

23:00 and the weather. Also if you look at the Australians and the British. Their fatality rate in prisoner of war camps in Korea on a ratio basis was much lower than the Americans. And with all due respect we are on par with them now in relation to those things. Hamburgers and Kentucky Fried and a soft training module that the Americans had, didn't help them.

23:30 Without getting too complex they also had the conscripts, the poor bastards who were thrown in, National Guard and so forth with very little training.

I wanted to ask you about Reg Saunders as well, in the early '50s it is pretty remarkable he would be an officer, he wasn't even an Australian citizen?

Now you are getting political, I told you before the Australian Army there is none of that bullshit. He

was commissioned in

24:00 World War II, he was commissioned in the southwest Pacific where he was promoted from sergeant to lieutenant. I am not sure about that. He served in Korea as a captain, he was with the first force to go over there. 3 RAR so he was at Kap'yong and then he returned and he was our company commander for a period of time

24:30 as a captain because the major was away somewhere, and so he was our company commander when we did that. Later on when the battalion left and left me behind because I was too young, that was the end of the world for me, because all of my mates were over there and I was still here waiting to go and he took me under his wing. And I shot through [ran away], I know I am digressing but we're on Saunders. I shot through,

25:00 this was my way of protesting about the system. I wrote to the Minister for the Army Kramer, and told him what I thought of him and the fact that I should be with my mates. He wrote a letter back saying, "You'll go when you're old enough." And I shot through and spent all of my money running around drunk in Melbourne, absent without leave. And then I went back and thought, "This will sort you out, what are you going to do? Are you going to punish me? Good. Twenty-eight days'

25:30 detention. Good. I have had a gutful of the army. You can all stick it." And you know what he did? He was there when I got back, "Congratulations, you have been made lance corporal." He completely ignored the fact that I had been AWL. I was promoted, he totally ignored it, he even covered the books which was totally illegal, he covered for me. So what do you do? I was humiliated.

26:00 My plan had fallen apart, the military wasn't supposed to do that, but I realised this bloke was saying, "I know how you feel but this is no way to act." So anyway I changed my tune, I didn't last as a lance corporal long, I was back to a private shortly afterwards. But no fault of Reg Saunders, he was one of the most outstanding leaders that I have ever had the privilege to serve under.

26:30 Back to the question, no he wasn't voting he wasn't an Australian citizen as such, but the army didn't see it that way, we never did. And that's why I said that comment, didn't matter white, black, brown, brindle, whatever, Catholic, Jew we were all in the same trench and it was one of the beautiful things about the army.

27:00 **Even more impressive than being in the same trench this guy was leading, I mean company commander?**

Exactly. There is another young bloke, an Aborigine again he is in there, Johnny Russell, he was an Aborigine, great mate, he was killed in Korea. When I think of all of the images of all of my mates, they are all there and there is a significant number of them that weren't born to white parents.

27:30 Bloody great Australians.

Can I ask you about your role as a batman, does that involve some swallowing of pride to be a batman?

No well a batman was an orderly. I was the batman because I was the youngest, and you're quite right nobody else wanted the bloody job.

28:00 It was only a temporary job, I didn't last that long. But it was part of the education system too, the army was very clever because you were there to assist the platoon commander when he was busy giving orders, you were there to answer the radio when he was giving things, all of that was part of the fabric that helped me back in life.

28:30 Equally back in camp you were supposed to iron his clothes and all of that as well. Well that didn't work with me, I was one of the untidiest ones out, so it wasn't long before they worked out I wasn't cut to be. Particularly when I was wearing his trousers, so it didn't last long.

Is there a story there?

Well that was the story, it was time for me to move on to be a rifleman infantry section

29:00 again because I wasn't very good at washing and ironing his clothes, let alone mine. And there came a time when he realised his wardrobe was being reduced and mine was being increased.

Was the position of orderly runner the same thing as batman?

Yeah it was the same thing, people use different terms but the batman is the orderly runner.

29:30 **So you would be doing a lot of that training that you described earlier, where the fellow was shot in the head?**

Well everyone wasn't trained that way but I would be the first choice if there was a message to be delivered, "Mansford, go and do this or that."

So you were pretty quick on your feet?

Well I was quite athletic, I was seventeen-eighteen at this stage.

30:00 I was pretty good out of the starting blocks, but most kids were, we used to run our own races as kids, run our own Empire Games or races.

How important was the empire to you at that point? Where did your allegiance stand, how would you describe the ratio of your importance

30:30 **between Australia and the Empire?**

At sign up age, it didn't mean much to me. Australia meant everything and the Pommies [English] were the Pommies. I had been indoctrinated by that, you know the subtly of it all. As a kid I can still see it, our maps in

31:00 geography books, there would be a map of the world and everything British Commonwealth Empire was red. Big Australia was red, India was red, the UK was red, half of Africa was red, Malaya was red and so it went on. Very impressive stuff. And even my school teacher, I had slashed my wrist, not

31:30 suicidal type but I had cut it on a window pane, this is 1943–44, he meant well, he said, "That is good British blood, George, and British soldiers don't cry." And I said, "I'm Australian." And so there was the difference, and

32:00 others like me hadn't been captivated or seduced by the geography books, but it was there. Maybe it was a bit too obvious but it was there. I think the other thing that helped us, but in those days we would see the movies once a week. And the ritual

32:30 before the movies started before you watched the movie, it would be God Save the Queen or God save the King [the national anthem] in those days and it was automatic, everyone would stand. And if you didn't stand as a kid, there would be an adult that you had never met before in your life behind you give you a clip over your ears. And so everyone would stand. But at the same time when the newsreel came on that was negated to a point,

33:00 because they would have the kookaburra and the kangaroo and the emu doing these things [on the screen] and a lot of us identified immediately with that. It wasn't as though our Irish background had suddenly leapt and we were the old Irish rebels coming to give the Pommies a bit of a pasting, it wasn't that at all. In summary it was there and I think it was deliberate, but it didn't work. Young

33:30 Australians were young Australians and we knew who and what we were.

Was that a difference between your generation and your father's generation?

I don't know you would have to ask him, my father was a Pom. I would say he was, but if you ask my mother and I say you would have to ask my father because, as I said, Dad was very reticent. But

34:00 when he sang it was always the British songs, he had a great voice, a great tenor. And he obviously had a great pride in the old country. Whereas Mum she was a fair dinkum bloody Australian, she was good with the language, my Mum was good with the language, within reason of course, she was quite the lady

34:30 but she was very good at putting people in their place.

Between the outbreak of World War II and Korea, in between that the Pacific War had occurred and the immediate defence of Australia, do you think there was a difference in what people were enlisting to fight for?

When we look

35:00 back historically there was. Even as a child then I can tell you the reasons now why we shouldn't rely on England and all of the rest of the stuff. Equally why we should not get too excited about the United States and god-damned America, for the very same reasons. We have got to keep our own independent spirit. And that included Iraq and Timor and all of these other bloody places, but I am getting off the edge there are you listening Canberra? Johnny [John Howard – Australian Prime Minister]?

35:30 So those things are there. Yeah I will leave it at that.

Take me to Puckapunyal and the news that 2RAR are to be sent to Korea, how is that news received?

Devastating.

How is it delivered?

Well oddly enough I was the runner that day inside the office and CSM [Company Sergeant Major] came in, Don Company,

36:00 this is important we were Don Company. Don Company played a very important part in the Battle of the Hook. And Don Company CSM came in and he said to me as a I was an orderly runner, "Mansford, I want you to get the AB3s." It is a document that gives your life, tells what you have been given, when you enlisted, with your height, weight everything,

36:30 that the army wants to know is in that little book. “And I want you to isolate everyone born before such and such a date and put them over there.” So I am looking and the company commander’s there and he said, “Sir I have anticipated that you have word?” He said, “Yes the battalion has been earmarked for Korea, we leave in March.” So I immediately know what the AB3 isolation was about,

37:00 and I went straight to the files, and McCutcheon, McCutcheon was a bit older than me but a young bloke, he has gone now Billy. But I put his into the good pile and I am just reaching for mine, I couldn’t find the bloody thing. And it turned out I had been to the Q [Quartermaster’s] store the day before and it wasn’t in, just as I was finding it the CSM realised what he was doing and came out and said, “I will finish that.”

37:30 McCutcheon was saved, he went under age. But as an aside, not so long ago at a reunion he said, “You know until you joined us.” it might have been when I did join them over there, “The night the bombardment started for the Battle of the Hook I was in my bunker and Jesus I was scared and I was bloody frightened. It was all coming down thump, thump, thump.” It was one of the world’s biggest barrages at that time.

38:00 And he said, “I thought that mongrel bloody Mansford, if that little smart arse hadn’t have done that I wouldn’t be here!” So the news was devastating and I and about fifteen other youngsters were removed, you had to be eighteen and nine months to go. And at that stage when they sailed I was eighteen and,

38:30 I wasn’t far off the age. I shot through, I stowed away or tried to stow away,

Can you explain that?

Well the troop ship is there and it means you are going to get on board and go as an illegal.

So from Puckapunyal you gather all of your gear together and you’re put on a train?

I am not part of it any more, I am in the rear detail. So I shoot through. And I

39:00 don’t take me gear, I just shoot through with my uniform and hat and toothbrush. And there is me, a fellow by the name of Belleville and a fellow by the name of Stockville. We shoot through. Belleville is cleverer than us, he keeps moving. We stay at the pub, the Prince of Wales for a few beers because we’re not sure if we are going to get on the train or

39:30 hitchhike to Sydney where it is all going from. And of course the MPs [military police] catch us and we’re put under close arrest and charged and absent without leave all of the rest, it wasn’t desertion but as close enough to it as far as they were concerned. So we ended up in gaol and detention.

There is a clink [gaol] at Puckapunyal?

No this is down at a place called Watsonia.

40:00 Which was an old migrant camp, that’s another story. Anyway Belleville, this is the interesting part of it, Belleville got on board and once the ship was at sea gave himself up and the CO had no choice but to fine him five miserable pounds and put him back on the strength of the unit. Mind you, he was a touch older than us. If we had have been on he would have thrown us

40:30 off in Japan I think. The interesting part about it, later on in life when I am an officer, Belleville is killed in action on the Training Team in Vietnam, and I have to take his place. That was the fortunes of war. I took his place. So then I had to go down to Watsonia and wait until I was old enough.

Tape 4

00:30 **Okay so you actually in the clink down near Singleton, is that right? Military police have grabbed you?**

Well they have passed me on so at that stage I am back in Watsonia in a very big house, two storey home which used to be a doctor’s surgery

01:00 and for some strange reason all of us youngsters who were too young had been there with the bloke who was too old, Reg Saunders, and it was there that I shot through and he covered for me and made me a lance corporal.

What was the age cap at the top end?

I can’t remember because Reg didn’t go because he had

01:30 already been and he was obviously getting close to that age with his rank, I assume. And yeah he wasn’t too happy about it either.

And what was the purpose of the rear guard being left at Watsonia?

Well because that was where we had a migrant camp and prior to the battalion being warned for Korea, before they were officially

02:00 committed to Korea, the migrant camp was a place where there was a hotbed of people stealing the huts. Some of the crooks would come in with a trailer and get one of the huts, demountables and put it on and take it away. And suddenly the camp was disappearing.

You were explaining why you were at Watsonia?

02:30 Yeah well you get this illegal removal of demountables and on top of that it got to the stage where the migrants, a lot of them were required to move. They had to get out into the community and a lot of them, particularly from the Baltic, didn't want to go. And so our job was to move them and it was very unpleasant because we were the subject of attacks, bottle throwing and whatever. And I can still recall one morning we were on top of the roof

03:00 removing the people, and the way the army decided to do it was just to take away the roof and force them to move. And we were removing the roof and down below me is a family with a couple of kids at the table, an old army table, having breakfast, and we're taking the roof off and that upset me a little bit. On top of that I fell in, fell on top of the table, hurt myself, got up and apologised and limped out

03:30 and they just kept eating breakfast. That was the reason we were there, they still had the camp, but by then it was deserted and we had the job of rear detail, to carry on the job that the battalion had been doing, looking after that camp. Now of course Watsonia is one of the big modern camps, it was ironic that many years later, about 1990, I went back down there as a Brigade Commander to a conference,

04:00 army conference, and I couldn't help but just go for a walk around and visit the old double storey building which is now the home of a military band. Very happy memories of those times. And we stayed there and eventually when I was old enough I went to Korea. And I arrived there at the ceasefire, and when the troop ship arrived we went into Pusan

04:30 and I met a lot of my mates again for the first time.

Were you sent with a group of reinforcements?

Reinforcements were going there all of the time, and our battalion went in and we took over from my mates, so the first thing I did was go and visit Delta Company and there weren't

05:00 many of them left, Delta Company had been heavily involved and took a lot of casualties.

So you weren't actually joining Delta Company, you were going as a reinforcement?

To replace them.

What was the name of your battalion?

1st Battalion. And so that was that. The ceasefire was on, and most of my time there was living what we call the Kansas Line, which was the next defensive position.

05:30 Improving that and patrolling the demilitarised zone.

So was that about April or May '53?

That was the battle. I got there after that, I got there at the ceasefire.

Mid '53 some time?

Yeah.

What was the Kansas Line?

06:00 Well there was two lines, the actual 38th parallel where you would go across, and on the ceasefire the units were required to pull back across the Imjin River and we were then moved into the Kansas Line to dig there.

How far from the Imjin River was that?

You could see it, you could see the river.

06:30 And some of its tributaries. And from there we would go forward across the Imjin and patrol in that area. Hence I was talking to you before about the cold. In summer it was a hundred degrees plus climbing those mountains and in winter it was below zero. That's why I always wondered about

07:00 when the 3rd battalion went there, when they arrived in 1950 they arrived with ordinary Australian equipment and how they survived God only knows. By the time I got there we had parkas and all sorts of underwear and boots. I was at a place called Tejong

07:30 guarding the railway and the cold was pain. Total pain. Pretty cold.

You arrived mid year so it would have been pretty warm at that stage?

I can't remember. I think it was pretty warm. I know the snow

08:00 started. I am pretty certain the snow started around November, Christmas, it was the first time I ever saw snow.

And do you recall what Pusan looked like from the troopship? Can you describe it for me?

It was just a hovel of humanity, filth and cardboard boxes. Koreans living in cardboard boxes and when the battalion arrived there was the

08:30 American band there to welcome us and a couple of American generals and British and we filed off and we stayed that night just out of Pusan, so we travelled through it. It was a hot bed of humanity, that was my first exposure overseas and suddenly here was these Koreans living in cardboard boxes, they were living in cardboard boxes, chock a block [crowded].

09:00 **And was war clearly evident in terms of the destruction of buildings?**

Everywhere. I mean we went up to the front line, not quite, but on a troop train from Pusan, it might have been Pijong, I can't remember now. But oh yeah war was everywhere.

09:30 I mean the bridges were destroyed, skeletons of tanks. It was always around, even after ceasefire it was quite obvious.

Was it in Pusan when you first arrived that you saw your old mates from Delta Company?

In the war cemetery, they were buried there, in the United Nations War Cemetery.

Can you tell me about visiting there?

Well it was very emotional,

10:00 I mean people like Johnny Russell, the Aboriginal I told you about, he was there. Keith Foran. Yeah a few of them.

And that was obviously fairly newly established?

Well the cemetery had been established since 1950, I assume they had to bury them somewhere so they buried them there. So they had been burying them there since 1950 when the first casualties occurred.

10:30 They were all buried in Korea and they never came home. It wasn't hard, just looked for the fellows killed in early '53 and that was it. Which was very emotional, I can still relate to Johnny in the section as I am leaving and we had a beer and so forth, and Keith Foran having breakfast and so on.

11:00 **So did you go out of your way to visit the cemetery or did you go as a battalion?**

No didn't go as a battalion, we went as a group, I did go out of my way. I was aware that they had been killed. What I wasn't aware of though when I went to visit Delta Company or Don Company, there was hardly anybody left it was all a new company really.

11:30 **Through injury?**

They had taken pretty heavy casualties. The bright side of all of that was Japan going on R&R [Rest and Recreation] in Japan as a young man. Trying to drink free macadamia and so on.

Before we leap over to Japan,

12:00 **can you tell me what you found when you made it up to the Kansas Line, was there handover of position to your company?**

Oh yeah.

Can you tell me a little about that what the process of hand over was?

Well the process with the battalion 2 RAR, they simply got on the trucks and took off, they were in a hurry to get home and we took over the line. The lines 2 RAR had started,

12:30 Kansas Line was a defensive line that had been there since 1950, but a very primitive one and you could still see where the Americans had fought and been overrun. There was a subtle difference, in the British system and our system obviously, we would always take the high ground and

13:00 dominate it with fire and not occupy the low ground and just dominate it with fire or moving patrols, or standing patrols. The Americans simply had a long line up and down the hills, they occupied the lot and hence they did not concentrate their fire in the right place and so forth. So it was not difficult to understand why in some places they got overrun, apart from the fact that the poor bastards were outnumbered.

13:30 **Can you describe what the defensive line consisted of?**

Bunkers, fighting trenches, mine fields, barbed wire, and you know forward positions depth positions the further you go up the hill. It would have been a pretty tough nut to crack, you certainly wouldn't get tanks up there.

Are we talking trenches similar to what was used in World War I?

14:00 In a vague sense I mean trenches in World War I conjure up the imagines of kilometres of long lines, similar to what the Americans had in their sand bag trenches. I am talking, if you imagine a position where there is a mountain behind you and it has got five spur lines going out, spur lines are occupied with connecting bunkers and connecting trenches and

14:30 in front of them barbed wire and in front of them minefields. And on the left and right flank, minefields covered by machine gun fire and so forth.

How deep were the trenches?

The fighting trenches would probably have been about five foot, six foot, just sufficient for you to put your head up.

15:00 But the bunkers were very substantial. Very solid timber and just small slits, where you could operate your weapons.

So are they sandbagged as well?

Yeah inside, the bunkers were all sandbagged as well.

And reinforced?

Reinforced with huge timbers and so forth.

And is there room for you to lie down in the trenches? Where would you rest?

15:30 You would sleep in the bunker. And they would have these, little stove and it was fed by kerosene and of course it glowed, like a drip system and the metal became hot like a belly stove. A 'choofer' that's what we called it. But you would get the smoke off it,

16:00 and you would get a choofer face, black, after you had been living in the bunker about a week you would be black. And they would take you back in small groups well behind to the rear area where you would have a shower, divisional bath and all of that sort of thing. And then you would go back and get black again.

And were you operating off individual ration packs?

16:30 American ration packs, they were good those days, they came with cigarettes.

And obviously being the ceasefire there was open movement between the reserve line and the Kansas Line?

There was never a problem with supplies even during the war, there would be the odd intermittent showing but not enough to stop us.

So how much food are you carrying on you personally?

17:00 I think the interesting thing about Korea was that we didn't carry a great deal, we had reserves in the bunkers, so whenever we moved on patrol normally you would just have a bar of chocolate or your own water or something. It wasn't like later days in Malaya and Vietnam where you

17:30 carried big packs on your back. Having said that, in Korea when they were advancing in 1950 and '51 and withdrawing, they were the real soldiers in the Korean War. They would have carried heavy loads, there is no doubt about it. The heavy loads when you were going backwards and forwards to take over that Kansas Line or whatever.

18:00 **In 1953 during the ceasefire you have got ration pack stores within the bunker?**

Yeah.

Ammunition stores?

Yeah.

For your .303s [rifles]?

Yeah.

Bren guns?

Yeah.

What other weaponry or ammunition have you got in the bunker?

Well in a rifle platoon in those days you have got the .303, which was the .303 bolt-action rifle.

18:30 You have got the Bren gun, which is the section machine gun, and you have got the submachine gun and we had the two inch mortar as well.

And in an average bunker you have got one platoon per bunker?

No you're talking about three or four men. And then the platoon, you know each section from memory there would be two bunkers, maybe three to the section and

19:00 two of them are forward and maybe one back in depth. And then another section would be on your left or right flank and there would be another couple of bunkers plus one in depth, and then the third section would be further back in depth. So you always had a lot of depth.

And the bunkers are running off the trenches, is that right?

Yes.

And that's what links all of the various?

You have got a communication trench, runs

19:30 in between the bunkers and so if you want to get from one bunker to another, you use the trench. If you want to go to your fighting pit you just turn left and go down the communications trench to the fighting pit.

And communication was done of foot?

There is radio but again in the '50s there was always a reliance on the runner. Certainly at the section platoon level. Because I mean

20:00 you only had one radio in each platoon.

So you would require a good memory for that role, as well as fast legs?

The training I was telling you about in Puckapunyal, they were using the extreme case. I mean a smart platoon leader would write it down and give it to you to take;

20:30 there were circumstances where you would slip or lose the message or you wouldn't have time, he wouldn't have a pen and pad and he would say, "For Christ sake, go and tell so-and-so such-and-such," and the reality is in the true sense that was training to emphasise, the reality is when I was a company commander, I used the same training methods

21:00 because it was good developing confidence and pride and all of the rest of the stuff. But in reality you might turn around and say, "For Christ sake Fred, go and tell the bastards that company headquarters are in heaps of deep shit [trouble]. We need lots of ammunition and we need reinforcements now!" Simple, as that so he wouldn't have to recite it or go back and get the message, so that was an important part of the training. It was the

21:30 military psyche too, they knew it was exaggerated, but they wanted to place the importance upon it, they wanted to challenge the youngster, and they wanted to know that he could do it and to make him proud of the fact that he had done it, and if he hadn't done it they also wanted to remind him that he had to do it. It was very clever, the system is clever and I must confess as I went through forty years of military I became just as cunning and clever, and there is probably a few young

22:00 men out there that regret that they went through the Battle School which I was given the task of starting.

Could you walk me through a typical patrol that you might perform?

You get your orders, it is normally at night time, on the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea], more often than not you would be in single file depending on the time of the year,

22:30 moonlight, you might get a bit more open. But for our nature of task we were looking mainly after the ceasefire for infiltrators or to make sure the Chinese didn't sneak across and so forth or start cheating.

Were you allowed to do patrols inside the [Korean] DMZ [38th Parallel]?

Yeah that was the job on our side of the DMZ, and you would move

23:00 along and be back before first light, normally back before first light.

How were the two section of the demilitarised zone separated? Was there a line a fence barbed wire?

Well there was a few mine fields to start with, that was a good deterrent to make sure you were on the right side of it. And we had a defined track,

23:30 and there was a couple of tributaries. I think it was the Sampalseon that was [the name of the definite boundaries]. It was eerie, I mean you would walk over the Hook which was the battle [where they won the battle honour 'Samichon'], and you would see where the heavy fighting was and the wrecks.

Did you ever encounter enemy contact?

We encountered enemy

24:00 **You saw the odd soldier?**

Oh yeah I seen them yeah.

Wouldn't they fire?

As a matter of fact when I came home I went back to the same battalion 2 RAR, we went immediately into Malaya, and I used to say to Billy McCutcheon and

24:30 the others, "I don't know what the fuss was all about Billy, the only bastards I ever met over there they seemed friendly enough they would wave at us, you exaggerated it."

So you didn't see combat in Korea?

No.

Why was that an important step in your military career there, what did you get from that what did you learn?

25:00 Well I was part of a big team, it was an achievement to go to Korea, there were people during the war who were sitting back twenty thirty miles who didn't do the hardships I did. It was a very challenging experience, living in the Kansas Line patrolling there, summer and winter and patrolling and doing all of those things. It wasn't easy and there was a fair degree of danger. I didn't have a problem with that, the

25:30 only disappointment I had that I had been removed from my original mates, I still get cranky about it.

How quickly did you fit into that new team?

Oh no problem at all I mean the military is a big family. We are talking about the Royal Australian Infantry.

Were you hardened in terms of dealing with the conditions was that a benefit to come from?

26:00 I mean if you weren't hardened you didn't survive, I think the training we had undergone and the discipline we had undergone prepared us for those circumstances. Without a doubt and we accepted it.

And you left there with a sense of satisfaction with you having achieved what you set out for at enlistment?

26:30 Yes I did I mean by the time we finished our twelve months the sense of satisfaction and achievement and eager to come home, to good old Oz. I had a at that stage I did have a girlfriend and was very much in love and couldn't wait to get home.

Had you been writing throughout the twelve months?

I mean she was a very attractive

27:00 girl I wasn't going to be that stupid, try to keep her on ice.

How important was receiving mail from home?

Oh always. No matter where you were I mean it is a very important part of life, it is your contact, it is your link with Australia and your family.

Did you depart Korea via Pusan Harbour as well?

27:30 No, we flew over from Korea to Japan. And we were in Japan for six or seven weeks before we then came home.

Tell em a little bit about Japan in those days. It had been seven, eight years since the [atom] bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, World War II was over,

28:00 **what were your impressions of the place?**

Well I saw the devastation of Hiroshima, it was still there. The Japanese were very resilient people, still are, and very friendly, believe it or not. When we came out of Korea we used to march through the streets in three ranks, you would see all of the old Japanese war veterans sitting on the side watching. I don't know what they thought,

28:30 they were soldiers too without getting into the politics of it. We had a great time, they were very

friendly and we were well received. We would be in the beer halls every night hanging off the ceilings and having a few beers and trying to win over the local young ladies.

Was contact still forbidden at that point?

No

29:00 I know [US General Douglas] MacArthur came out with a few edicts when the occupation started but my gut feeling, knowing soldiers, that any edict saying there was to be no fraternisation with the local community might have been official, but it certainly wasn't practised, there

29:30 would have been communication without doubt. And certainly by the time we got there I mean the occupation was over, the occupation was over I think in 1952, or officially the war ended and they were a nation in their own right and it was a great place. Had a ball. Still wanted to get back to good old Oz.

30:00 **You had six weeks there?**

About that.

And that was pure down time enjoyment?

The army was trying to keep us busy with some very basic training. We weren't really interested, we were on our way home and the army was smart enough to realise that and tried to get us home as quick as they could.

When you came home, who did you visit?

30:30 I went back to see my mother. And stepfather, he was a World War I veteran as well.

Did you know him?

Well I knew him obviously after he married Mum yeah.

Did that happen while you were still in Australia?

It did while I was at Puckapunyal I think, lovely bloke.

31:00 He was a World War I bloke coughing his lungs up all of the time with the gas from Anzac. I visited them and then my girlfriend. We were only kids really, I was only twenty and she was nineteen. She came over by train to the family.

Visiting your girlfriend?

31:30 And she came over and I am proud to say they were very chaste in those days. No matter how much effort I made I never got anywhere. Anyway she went back to Brisbane. I rejoined the 2nd Battalion and in a short time we were warned for service in Malaya, for an emergency, for two years.

32:00 **Where was 2 RAR based?**

Enoggera in Brisbane. And so I decided, initially we were just going to get engaged and I said, "Well two years is a long time out of my life, and her life, and the reality is she is a very, very attractive girl. There is always the chance that some other bastard might arrive on the scene." So we decided to get married before I left. So that was

32:30 homecoming because it wasn't long before the battalion was going through Canungra to change from Korea tactics to jungle warfare. And so that's what we did.

A few fellows seizing the opportunity of being at home to get married and that sort of thing?

Oh yeah. A few did that.

33:00 Marriage was a pretty common thing in those days. So we didn't have much time really, Canungra took a long time for us and getting the wrong training I might add for Malaya. But there was another character there, by the name of George Wharfe. He is another fellow that I learnt a lot from.

33:30 He was one of the legends of World War II, colonel, as I mentioned he ran the Battle School in Canungra, not to be confused with the Battle School I started later on in life at Tully. And I can remember, as we started to climb up this huge mountain, it was an eight hour climb with all of these heavy packs and George Wharfe was there at the bottom and he looked at me as I went past and he said, "G'day."

34:00 and I said, "G'day sir." And I got nearly to the top, about six hours later and the message came back, Colonel Wharfe wants to see you, "Where is he?" "Back down at the bottom of the mountain." So I went all of the way back down and it is getting dark at that stage so I knew I would have to wait until the next morning to climb up again, absolutely exhausted. And Wharf said, "You're wearing a female bayonet." And the bayonet had a ring in it, I had it back to front, he had brought me all of the way down the hill to tell me that.

34:30 But his message was clear, attention to detail. And from then on I always made sure my bayonet was in the correct position and everything I did for a patrol or anything was spot on, because he was quite right. The next day I walked right up the bloody hill again.

Canungra by that stage would have been a very well oiled machine I mean they had so many guys pass through World War II?

35:00 Well no it wasn't, Canungra. I can't remember the date, but they opened up Canungra again specifically for our battalion, because we were going to Malaya, so they were relearning the ropes. Canungra really hit its maximum efficiency,

35:30 the well oiled machine as you put it, was 1967, that was during the Vietnam War, when it really hit its peak, very efficient machine I mean they were still teaching us World War II tactics and assaults by Japanese and so forth and as we found out when we got to Malaya the

36:00 techniques we were using were not good, not smart, training for the last war so to speak. I mean the very first contact our section had was with one individual who happened to be a very lucky young man. I was the second scout, the forward scout opened fire,

I don't want to rush ahead to Malaya I want to stay focused on Canungra, what was some of the World War II training?

36:30 World War II training, it was basically all conventional war, where you ran into the enemy you would then deploy and get information whether you were going to hit him from the right flank or the left flank or simply going to stay as a fire base; while somebody else came up to support you or fall back, all of those sorts of problems.

What was some of those training drills that you might perform?

37:00 Contact drills we called them. You might be the forward scouts would go to ground the machine gun would go to the high ground, if there was no higher ground it would always go to the right. The rifle group would close up ready to be deployed as the section commander saw fit. The reason for that – you didn't need to wait for any orders to be given, that was immediate drill no matter how heavy the fire was or you couldn't hear anything, that's what would happen.

So your

37:30 **commanders might send you out on patrols and then mock an assault on you?**

They did all of that. If you were practising contact drills you would spend all day from first light to last light going around this contact circuit and there would be a series of incidents and you would carry out your contact drill or if it was an ambush you would carry out ambush drill or attacking you would carry out attack procedures.

38:00 **What was the job of a rifleman during an ambush drill?**

Kill people. In an ambush you have got your killer group, you have got your cut off groups, or your flank groups depending on the nature of the enemy, and you have got depth. The killer group is there to kill, the groups on the flanks are there to provide warning and then act as a cut off, to kill. And the rear protection is obviously there to protect you in case the enemy come from an unexpected direction.

38:30 Basically the main role of that particular ambush is to kill people. Unless you have been told to get a prisoner. And it's without doubt the most effective way of fighting a war. You are killing

39:00 people with less risk to yourself, to put it bluntly.

And were you needed to spend a decent amount of time on the range, at that point?

Oh yeah we always spent time on the range I mean that was another part of the training, sneaker lanes you would move as an individual along, and targets would pop up from everywhere, you do that day in and day out. Then you fire from the ambush positions by day and night, and then you do an obstacle course and finish up firing when you do that.

39:30 Point of exhaustion. Canungra was good at that sort of thing.

And were you actually staying out at Canungra or were you coming back into Enoggera?

No you stayed at Canungra in a little tent in the middle of winter. The army always had very good timing for their training for war; they always seemed to pick places where in winter the fire bucket outside the tent would be frozen, even at places like Canungra, very cold.

40:00 **And obviously you were training to eat as you would in wartime?**

Always training for war yeah.

You're on rations?

Well occasionally you would get a fresh ration, that was the cycle through all army life, but I expect

without being too cynical that the only reason you got fresh rations was because the combat rations suddenly became too

40:30 expensive. They had to find ways to feed you cheaper, but yeah it was mainly combat rations. But in those days the combat rations was the ten man pack, for example a tin of beans a tin of potato a tin of asparagus and you would have a tin of pineapple, tomato and a tin of meat and everyone carried their respective tins and the section commander. And the theory was

41:00 that night you would all get together, put it in a big stew pot and have a communal dinner. And everyone would get their share. But the reality was. particularly in jungle, even in jungle but more so in jungle, if you were wounded or if you were detached or had another job, when the section got together there would always be somebody missing. And if it happened to be that he had the meat, then you all became vegetarians. Or if he had the pineapple then he had to make a

41:30 pig of himself on pineapple and go without breakfast or lunch the next day. It was a pretty rudimentary way of eating and we hated the ten man packs. But they were with us in Korea after American rations. And certainly in training in Canungra.

Tape 5

00:35 **Do you feel that your training was adequate?**

In some ways it was that it prepared us for living in the rainforests and jungles so to speak. It was

01:00 not adequate in that in my view it was training us for the last war, that is World War II, the training was training us for a conventional enemy, where the enemy were going to stand and fight. And the reality was that when we were operating in Malaya we were operating again an enemy, small bands of communist terrorists operating in bands in the rainforest, who did exactly the opposite, they would break contact as

01:30 quickly as possible. But in fairness to the system, when we went to Malaya the main purpose of going there was as part of SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] to meet any conventional threat so one couldn't be too critical of the training. But once we were there and in operations against the terrorists, I think we were probably I say we as a generalisation, were probably a little remiss in that we

02:00 didn't come to terms with the threat that we faced. And consequently in the beginning we weren't that good.

You didn't go directly into operations, did you, when you got to Malaya, did you go to Penang Island first?

We arrived in October and we were there for November and December and we were committed from memory on January the 1st when our battalion moved

02:30 at night to begin operation in Kedah which was supposedly, relatively free of terrorists and would be a good training ground for us. It was the opposite.

Can I ask you first about your experience at Penang Island. How was that training different to what you had been doing at Canungra?

Well it wasn't, much different, except that the training on Penang Island was basically

03:00 maintaining physical fitness and team work and doing the odd exercise out there at the section platoon level. But we still paid a penalty for it, because we were still concentrating on platoon and company groups. In my view we should have been concentrating on much smaller groups to meet the enemy that we were about to get into.

What did you know of that enemy at that stage?

Oh we knew a bit, we had received

03:30 very good briefings on the way over on the troop ship the Georgic. We had been briefed on the history of it and we were familiar with where they started and what they were, and what the situation was at that time. And in 1955.

It had been going on for some years?

1948 it

04:00 started yeah, and by 1952 they just about had a grip of the whole country. Then the British introduced the Bridges plan which was to isolate the villages from the terrorists which was very effective.

Could you explain the Bridges plan?

Where you had all of the farming communities scattered around the valleys and the low lands, they then

re gathered them and placed them into

04:30 communities behind barbed wire, not concentration camps, but a community protected by barbed wire to isolate the guerrillas from them and at the same time provide protection for them. Basically this meant that the support by the Malay community had been severed from the terrorists and it was their main source

05:00 of supply and assistance. There was only one entry and exit and everybody was searched on the way out and way it and so their normal line of supply was drained out. They tried to do that in Vietnam but failed miserably because they didn't understand the basic principles in that you had to guarantee protection and they didn't do that.

05:30 **So the Malayan people were actually under physical threat from the CTs [communist terrorists]?**

Without a doubt. Even from the Sungai Siput, where the emergency first started and coincidentally where we ended up when we moved from Kedah into Perak, in Sungai Siput. They were under threat and even in our time 1955, 56, 57 there were quite a few

06:00 incidents where rubber tappers Chinese, Malay, Indian were assassinated, butchered, murdered because they wouldn't cooperate.

I understood the conflict to be aimed mainly at the British is that right? At removing the British colonial force?

Well that's right, yeah the Poms. It was a colony of course when we first went

06:30 there and the MPJA [Malay People's Anti-Japanese Army], the fellows that started all of this their argument, was to break the shackles of colonialism and become independent. But of course that argument became flawed when the British announced that Malaya was to become an independent state in 1956–57? It escapes me.

07:00 '57 I suspect. So that would be the argument. It is similar to Iraq they are talking about, American colonists and power groups and everything else, but they are still just changing their tune. And that's exactly what Chin Peng [Malay Communist Leader] did, it was only part of it, they simply wanted a communist dominated state.

07:30 **So you were going into an area of operations which was largely under control, for four years or so it had been relatively stable? The British had been back on top, created these fenced in communities, what did you understand your role to be then?**

To hunt and kill the terrorists, to destroy them. The British had been successful but it still

08:00 wasn't under control. There was still terrorist activities and a lot of areas were 'black', black meaning it wasn't safe to travel. You could be ambushed or subject to attack. Kedah was black, but the point they made was we were put in there initially because they thought it would be a good training ground because intelligence said that there wasn't much activity around.

08:30 The truth was we walked into a pretty little place of terrorist activity, they had just been having a good time there, resting and enjoying themselves. And so that was the setting, our intelligence wasn't good, it was very similar to American intelligence today. With all due respect to our American cousins, I don't think their intelligence has been any good ever since the Battle at Alavair,

09:00 they always seem to get the wrong information somewhere along the line. We certainly had it wrong and the end result was we no sooner arrived there preceded by big publicity back home and air strikes and artillery and bombardments, we went in. And the bottom line was where the air strikes and the artillery had been, it just made our job more

09:30 difficult because they had knocked a few trees down and we had to go around in the rain forest which is not so easy.

When you say terrorist activity was hot in that area, what sort of activities?

The terrorists weren't active against the community but we walked into an ants' nest, there was a lot of them there just taking their time, and that's why everyone thought it was quiet

10:00 because they didn't think there would be much around. The end result was we went in there and by day two we were already in contact with an enemy group. Our company sergeant major was ambushed, he survived it and other companies started to have contacts around the area. And our section found an enemy camp within ten days of being there. Rather substantial enemy camp which had just

10:30 recently been deserted. As we went in the front door they obviously went out the back door.

In the case of finding the enemy camp, what was there to be done, were they destroyed?

No, there was none of the Vietnam approach because there wasn't really anything to destroy, other than a couple of

11:00 thatched huts. We found it, we came across a pig wallow and then started to go uphill, the idea being which we had been taught, it made perfect sense, that they were going to have their camp near water, same as we did. You needed water no matter where you were, in the rainforest or the jungle. And so we just turned the corner and there is this big enemy camp, deserted,

11:30 it had its weapon pits and cooking pot and the fire was still going. So they had either heard us and we had been in contact with a courier the day before, not far from there, and that's where they might have taken off, they might have heard the shooting. Again they were an organisation at that time not prepared to fight. And sensibly so.

What sort of weapons were they carrying?

12:00 They would carry anything, World War II weapons, captured weapons from British they had ambushed, Malays they had ambushed, Malayan regiments, anything from Thompson submachine guns, rifles and shotguns to Sten guns, pistols, home-made booby traps, they had a collection.

That even grew out of a movement that was the anti-Japanese resistance wasn't it?

12:30 The MPJA. Their origins were from World War II and they were very much dominated by people like Chin Peng and so forth who were communists and so when the war ended they were supposed to hand all of their weapons in and they were clever and didn't and poached them. and in 1948 and didn't get their own way they

13:00 decided they would spread the word by claiming they wanted independence.

Was there any evidence you came across of communist support from either China or Russia?

That's why they didn't survive and that's why the Bridges plan was very successful because that was their only support. Their only other way was by sea and that didn't happen and or across the Thai border and that certainly didn't happen. I mean the Thai

13:30 border there might have been a bit of food from sympathisers, but they had no supplies at all and that was their big mistake. And that was the difference between there and Vietnam where you had the Ho Chi Minh Trial and North Vietnam and China being directly involved in supplying the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

You mentioned earlier in training you would have been better off practicing patrols in smaller groups,

14:00 **once you got into patrols, how large were the groups you were patrolling in?**

Well it depended on what the mission was, but it is true to stay we moved around once we got in we moved around in section groups, but the problem with all of that was, a section wasn't too bad, a section was about nine people and given that you always had

14:30 sickness or somebody not there you would have seven or so people, and that was as many as you needed, you probably didn't need any more. But the great difficulty was the technique in those days. The company in many occasions would move in as a company and then each platoon would move to their own areas and then each platoon in turn would move to their own areas and then send out fan patrols at section strength.

15:00 Now the problem was the initial phase, the company moving in, you left a lot of tracks and you made a lot of noise no matter how good you were, and a company takes a lot longer to go into place than five or six people. In hindsight, we would have been a lot better there is no doubt about that, and the infantry are very capable of operating in very small groups, like your SAS [Special Air Service] and so forth. The Special Forces don't have a monopoly on that,

15:30 our people were very competent in doing that sort of thing. But we didn't because it was still the hang over from the past.

Who was your section leader at that time?

It is an interesting one, again I was still a private, I was very slow out of the block actually. Our section leader in Kedah

16:00 was a fellow by the name of Timmy Payne, he was a Korean War vet and we had another fellow Dick Mars, I think, he was an ex-prisoner of war of the Japanese. We had 'Bomber' Harris, Distinguished Flying Medal, another ex-RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] fellow that won his Distinguished Flying Medal over Germany during the war as a tail gunner.

16:30 About fifty per cent of us had been overseas before. And Timmy Payne was our section commander. Our platoon sergeant was a bloke who had served in the Middle East. And the other two section commanders were both veterans, so it was a pretty well experienced group.

17:00 **Just how important was local intelligence to your operations?**

Very important, but I mean it was the way it was received and acted upon. If local intelligence went

through the intelligence system, and then filtered down to brigade and brigade gave it to battalion and battalion gave it to company and company gave it to us, sometimes we would get messages that so and so

17:30 was going to RV, but hang on that was the day before yesterday. But obviously intelligence like that was very important, equally if you got intelligence and didn't act upon it you would lose the confidence of those who gave it, a lesson for any campaign. We had an incident after we moved into Perak where a sister company had shot up a couple of terrorists and one of them got away but he had been badly

18:00 wounded. The intelligence came through that he was suffering gangrene in his hands where the shotgun pellets through his hand and he was hiding out, his brother dobbed him in actually. So we sent out a small group, I was part of it and we went to where we knew he was hiding and he resisted and was killed and it was an

18:30 example of good intelligence and timely response. On another occasion there was an incident in Sungai Siput, the place I mentioned after we moved out of Kedah into Perak. Where there was several people in a bar, we were in a bar a couple of us had just moved into the toilets when this bloke threw a grenade in, came past on a bike and threw the grenade in and up she went, a couple of little girls were badly wounded.

19:00 And they got this bloke, he was on his bike and under careful interrogation by the local police, the Malay police, he decided to confess and gave some very variable information including the fact that there was some fifteen terrorists going to RV [rendezvous] out in an area outside of the rubber in a place called Jalon Tingi.

19:30 that was the information, it was hot, it was timely. And so we reacted, we went out as a company group during the night walking through the rubber in sandshoes to mask our normal patterned boots from the rubber tappers which would be out the next morning, which we did. And the concept was an area ambush where

20:00 we would have a number of groups scattered around the area. In addition we had mortars and Vickers machine guns. and unfortunately the enemy did arrive, but they arrived where there was very poor battle discipline in one particular group and they were still setting up their ambush when the gunner saw them coming and he couldn't contact anyone so at the last minute he opened fire and he only fired one round out of his Bren gun

20:30 before it jammed. And of course it was another example of what these people believed in, flee to fight another day, which is very sensible. So they dropped their fourteen packs and fourteen hats or whatever it was and took off. And of course the firing started and our group was supposed to move, that was second plan to move around and cut off but the mortars and machine gun fire provided a barrier

21:00 between us and them. The end result: we didn't get anyone, we got fourteen packs. The end result was that we obviously lost a lot of confidence in the source of intelligence. Not smart. And this comes back to team work and everything else. And so we had the bad news and the good news, and that was one of the bad news.

You said you had lost confidence in the source of intelligence, or was it the source of intelligence losing confidence in you?

21:30 Well we lost that source because of lack of confidence.

Was that a fragile relationship with the local population?

Well it was very fragile because if they gave information and they were putting up their hand, they were coming forward even though it was treated with a great deal of confidentiality. if the bloke they had dobbed in didn't get captured or killed, then he would start

22:00 thinking, how did they know where I was? Suddenly the informer would be probably on the receiving end, and that happened more than once I might add. People found out in the rubber with their throats cut. Malaya was a very tough war in the emergency in that it required a very high degree of physical fitness, you weren't in contact every day,

22:30 but when it happened it was short and sharp and often without any warning whatsoever. One occasion I can recall, an enemy camp we were at and it was getting close to last light when the forward scout, I was the second scout, indicated it was raining very heavy rain and there were tracks coming in and sure enough there were tracks joining

23:00 this track we were on. Platoon commander was very new to the game, he had just arrived in country. We had been there about fifteen months at this stage and had been in a number of contacts. And experience, and he said, "No, they're rubber tappers." And I undiplomatically pointed out that rubber tappers never operated in the rainforests because it was a 'free go area' – we could shoot them and there was no way in the world they would do it. Anyway we were told to move on. So we moved on a little further and there was more tracks coming in.

23:30 It was obvious that there was a big party in front of us, but the platoon commander's main concern was to harbour up for the night which we should have already done because it gets very dangerous if you're

moving at that time of the day, the light is failing, your vision is failing and there is a need to organise yourself on the ground with daylight, so you know what you're going to be doing that night. As it turned out Terry and I were doing leap frog, I walked past him

24:00 and as it turned out, obviously their day sentry had gone into camp to start their night routine, and I walked around the corner and there they are. So we said a quick "G'day!" to each other and into it. And I didn't worry about fire control. I just let the whole magazine go on my Owen gun and then replaced it and started to go again when I heard a clunk, the round had jammed into the spout [gun's barrel]. In the meantime, the rest of

24:30 the fellows hadn't arrived and they decided that was time to get into me. And I dived behind this stash of rice and you could see the rice trickling down where they were getting into me. And 'Bomber' Harris arrived on the scene, really saved my life I guess, and he started to engage these with his Owen gun. The end result is that we hit several and they took off and we got a couple of rifles. But I

25:00 make that point because one minute you're wet, tired, cold, hungry and all you want to do is harbour up for the night and the last thing on your mind is walking into an enemy camp. And suddenly you go around the corner and there it's on. There were a few incidents like that.

You said that it was known by the locals that in the rainforest it was open slather [no limits]?

25:30 Yep.

So in effect the rainforest had just become …?

Free fire zone.

And so the local people keep to themselves?

There was no reason for anybody to be inside the rainforest. The rubber meets up with the rain forest and our rules of engagement were when you were in the area of the rubber, you would certainly be very careful. We only had one incident in

26:00 our company where we killed a rubber tapper by accident, supposedly he was an innocent rubber tapper, I should say. But he was outside the curfew and it was at night time. And you have got to ask what is a rubber tapper doing out at night wandering through the rubber? The excuse his family gave he was going to worship at the local temple there, it was a bit

26:30 suss, [suspicious] anyway he was killed, it was during curfew. If it was daytime in that area, we would never engage anybody in the rubber. Until we actually identified that they were enemy and there would be a couple of occasions including in our company where we missed out because of that doubt. Inside the jungle I am not familiar with the rules of contact now, but

27:00 common sense would tell us that if you were on the edge of the jungle you would be very careful, but the incident I just explained to you was well inside the jungle and no doubt at all. The exception being the Saki, which was Malaysian for Aborigine, very primitive people, you know, the blowpipes and the loincloth,

27:30 bare feet and so forth, they used to be around. But you would have to go very deep in the jungle to find them and on those particular operations you would be told to be careful, unless of course the Saki was wearing a khaki hat and khaki jacket and carrying weapon, then you didn't bother.

Were the enemy wearing khakis?

They were wearing all sorts of dress but dirty khaki seemed to be the most

28:00 common dress they had. With their cap with the red star on it.

You talk about how you would often stumble on contacts winding down for the day, was there a permanent tension to the patrol?

That was the whole point. When we went back on our second tour of operation, I went back to 1 RAR the second time,

28:30 the emergency was still on. It was the same, I mean there is always tension there, you are out in the middle of nowhere. And your visibility, your knowledge of the area, is as far as you can see, which isn't far. Probably the tension is more after, because you have been there before, and you know what the unexpected can result in. The tension is there, but soldiers

29:00 have a way of dealing with it. You get around the camp fire or the stove at night time, have a few cigarettes, heavy smokers, have a brew and your great luxury in life is to put up your tent and take your wet clothes off, put your dry set on and try and get some sleep before you're required for sentry duty, and next

29:30 morning it is back on again. Take your dry clothes off and put your wet clothes back on again and get on with it for another day. But the tension varies if you suddenly think that you have found hostile signs then the adrenaline will start pumping, and then you find what you have found is a monkey track or

something and then there is the big deflation. The tension

30:00 is there. It is the same. I am often amused by the people who talk about the boys in Timor, there were very few contacts but the reality is that a soldier that goes outside the wire, in a DMZ wherever, wherever you go outside the wire there is tension. And you might go out a hundred times and not fire a shot, but it doesn't detract from the tension that the soldier had, Timor or wherever. It is an important factor.

30:30 **Unlike Korea, where you could patrol and come back to the safety of your trenches, here in Malaya you were permanently in the zone?**

There is no such thing as safety I suppose, even in the trenches you have got sentries and security, you are more isolated, like in Malaya and

31:00 Vietnam because you are in the jungle, you are isolated. And your only contact with the outside world is a radio. And if your radio is not working then you haven't even got that contact. And if you have a casualty in those days, 1955, '57, evacuation by air was not common. You would normally have to evacuate by foot and if you were carrying a litter then it was a long time.

31:30 **How do your nerves cope with that permanent sense of tension, do you literally develop techniques and methods?.**

Well it is no big deal, a soldier is a soldier and you know that out there is an enemy. And the danger is that some sentry starts reading a book or whatever, because he thinks or they think, that there is no real danger around,

32:00 well he is being stupid of course, and probably hasn't been involved in those contacts. But it is no big deal, the tension is there but that comes from soldiering and soldiers develop ways to switch out of it. And interestingly enough some of us would argue that

32:30 soldiers get rid of that tension because when they get back to camp they just get a belly full of beer and get drunk. Others would argue in today's society that they are nothing but drunks and they needed counselling, but the reality is when soldiers get drunk they talk about it, they release, and they might even have an argument amongst each other and then it is all over, it is as right as rain and they go back again. And each time you go out

33:00 you're getting tired, but I suppose it is true to say that later on in life it might catch up with some of them in many ways. If you have the adrenaline pumping too often, it is going to have an impact on your heart or your nervous system or something. No big deal, we certainly didn't see it that way I mean it

33:30 was expected. And to be fair and critical of ourselves I suppose it was also the macho effect of it. If you did feel a bit nervous you certainly weren't going to tell your mate about it. Because that's the other interesting thing, it doesn't matter if it is Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Somalia or World War II, World War I or whatever, it is utter bullshit to say people stand and hold fast because of the flag of their nation,

34:00 or Mum at home with their apple pie as the Americans would say. It is all about your mates, it is all about not letting your mate to the right or left down. That's the most important thing that comes first. As simple as that. it is comradeship. You can't afford, you're not going to, it's an honour, you can't afford to let you mates down no matter what the consequences. The same as in our regiment, we always said we would not leave our wounded behind. And we never have.

34:30 With very few exceptions. And we will never leave our dead behind, unless, it that happened on occasion you don't risk somebody's life for somebody who is dead. But it was that ethos, that character, and it was all built around that mateship that started way back in recruit training that started in that very primitive building when somebody said, "Clean your room." That's where it started and developed and it

35:00 is a very powerful weapon. Even today I can take you to a reunion where we all get emotional when we see each other. Some would even say we're bloody poofters [homosexuals], we hug each other and kiss each other and whatever. We do. Because it is a bond stronger than others. Very strong., it is the most powerful weapon an army has if it has got mateship. And we have got it,

35:30 and we have still got it although we have got to be very careful and this is another thing I preach, Australian soldiers are very good at initiative and thinking for themselves and what we don't want is to stamp it out of them and have goose stepping robots replace them. That's our big strength in the Australian army.

In this period in Malaya, experiencing that tension and patrolling that was different to Korea,

36:00 **but were you seeing bloodshed really for the first time?**

No I had seen a couple of mine incidents and I had seen it in training. Blood wasn't common, but it wasn't baptism and it wasn't rare.

Was that something you needed to adapt to in Malaya?

Well I guess you have to adapt to it.

36:30 I mean circumstances change as you get older. You become probably more emotional, as you get older you become wiser, you start to question even the validity of why you are there, so there is always a need to adapt. But what you have while you're in that system you have got the maturity and the experience and soldiers have it, the intelligence to be able to analyse it.

37:00 **Were you doing it in Malaysia at that stage? You were still pretty young?**

Well I was twenty-one. In Malaya I was still very young yes, but I knew what the enemy was all about. I had seen blood around, not much but I had seen it. I had been involved in it, pressing the trigger. And I didn't see

37:30 anything wrong with that and I would argue to this day that I was just your perfectly normal young Australian that happened to be in uniform. I was drinking a fair bit but it wasn't as though I had to have a drink every night. But whenever it was there we didn't stuff around.

38:00 If it was there to be drunk you drunk it. You didn't sip at it and have a couple of nice polite conversations and that was probably one of the worst aspects of soldiering, we never did anything moderately as soldiers in those days, but equally I think it was a good release.

What other release was there, did you have leave, head into the major towns when did you get a break from the jungle?

38:30 Well in the first tour, yeah there were towns and so forth. Leave wasn't that often; you would probably do four to five weeks out there, carry huge weights and rely on air drops and if the air drops didn't come. Then you really have to start sharing your last couple of biscuits with your mates or give up

39:00 smoking for a few days, or whatever. But yes, leave was there. The second time of course when I was over there, there was no contacts. The enemy had gone, dispersed, over the Thai border or whatever and that's where we were operating on the Thai border and to my knowledge, and you might here different, but the reality is we didn't have any contact in the second tour and we didn't have any battle casualties, no battle deaths.

39:30 But nevertheless, if you talked to some of the mates that were with me, be they Korean or World War II or Malaya on the first trip there will be generally common agreement that our second tour of duty in 1961 was the hardest. Because we still didn't know what was around the corner. There was no contact, they were still trying to maintain an alertness with the young blokes who

40:00 suddenly believed there was no bad blokes around, and the physical demand was even more immense than the first tour. There was a lot of movement, a lot of walking and a lot of climbing. And a lot of going without, it was pretty tough. And yet, see there is the comparison, there was no enemy. And yet oddly enough, sadly enough, a lot of the young

40:30 fellows that went on that trip never fired a shot in the true sense, but were magnificent infantry, you will never see them on Anzac Day because they don't think they belong to it. And I keep arguing, I get very angry with them, because they are very much part of it.

Tape 6

00:30 **Can I just clarify the dates, for both of your tours in Malaya?**

1957 with 2 RAR when I first went across there and then I returned with 1 RAR in 1959 to '61.

Can you talk a bit about the relationship between the British and the Malayan police force and the Australians?

Well we didn't have a great deal to do with either, other than obviously at the headquarters, by the second trip I

01:00 had actually made the rank of corporal, we didn't have a great deal to do with. We got on relatively well with the British soldiers, although on the second tour of duty there was a great difference of view between one of their regiments and ours, to the point where Ipo was a town put out of bounds to us. My platoon

01:30 commander had been killed and so I was acting platoon commander as a corporal, and I felt my duty to go down, and 'Doggy' Williams was his name, he was back home and he wanted to introduce me to his new bride, a Chinese girl in Ipo, and so we went down there and as we left my mates in the canteen at Lassa, we were off patrol at that stage. They said, "It is out of bounds." And I said, "Don't worry about it, nobody is

02:00 going to see us." Anyway I went down and I didn't go to see his Chinese wife. I went to the bar and I am eventually drinking with a couple of Brits much older that I am, and one of them is asking me, "How can we settle this problem between our regiment and yours?" And I said, "What do you reckon?" And he

said, “A football game?” And I said, “No, that would be a blood bath. A better idea would be for some of your blokes to go on patrol with us and some of our guys to go patrol with you.”

02:30 And he said, “What a wonderful idea, by the way my name is Colonel So and So I am the commanding officer and this is my regimental sergeant major.” Of course I was only a corporal by then. I thought I am not even going to tell them who I am. Anyway at that stage my mate from Lassa walked in, they had decided to come down to Ipo to get me. And as they walked in I was with the CO [Commanding Officer] and I was hobnobbing it and so I just ignored them as they sat down and before I could go over and join them

03:00 the military police arrived, and they put them all under close arrest because they were out of bounds, they were in Ipo. And they knew I was one of them, but they also knew the CO and the RSM of this British Regiment, so they didn’t touch me. And as they were wheeling these blokes out they were saying, “What about him?” So I went back to camp, grabbed the platoon, we were off. We went up to the Thai border, and when we were

03:30 relieved, the helicopters came up and out came this fellow Frank Moffat, and where he used to have two stripes [corporal’s stripes on his arm] they had gone, and there was just a faded area where his stripes used to be. I knew straight away he had been busted [demoted]. I said, “G’day Frank.” He said, “Don’t Frank me you bastard, I lost those trying to go down and look after you and you see that little bastard” and there, you can spot him a mile away, he was a Pommy, they always wear their hats down over their eyes and they have got this pale skin.

04:00 He said, “You said that little bastard, because one of our so called mates was big mouthing with the CO of the British bloody battalion, I have got to put up with that little bastard for the next six weeks! And two of my best soldiers are down there being stuffed around by the Pommies.” And he said, “You wouldn’t know who thought that one out would you?” So anyway he turned around to this Pommy, the little Pommy is standing behind a log with his rifle looking out and he said, “I told you to go further back,

04:30 go back another kilometre, I don’t want to see you again.” When I got back to camp ‘Peggy’ O’Neil, our company commander, was there and he was beside himself. He said, “George I have got some bad news, Frank’s been busted, Duchy has been busted, Rowan has been busted, I had no choice to put them before the CO and they have all been stripped [lost their rank]. That makes you the

05:00 senior corporal in the company.” And I put my hand around him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Sir I am with you, you have got to do what you have got to do.” So that answers the first part. We didn’t get on very well with the Poms at all as soldiers. Together, if there was a fight, we would be mates. Anyway then about three weeks later I went down with malaria and was recuperating in the Cameron Highlands,

05:30 a cold part of Malaya, good for convalescence for malaria, bad malarias. And it was Anzac Day. I had recovered and we got permission to go and visit the local bar from the Pommy doctor in the Pommy hospital. And while we were there the Pommy RSM arrived and he hadn’t been told we were allowed out and ordered us back to camp. Of course I had had a few drinks by then, and told him to stuff off [go away]. Anyway there was a fight and I flattened him

06:00 and I ended up in the local gaol that night and when I got back to the hospital I had about five offences, all very serious ones, striking a senior officer and all of the rest of the stuff, and I thought “That’s me I am gone!” We got back to camp and Holland and Moffat, they are all beside themselves, they have all got their rank [back] by this stage, the company commander had no choice, there was no more experience in the company. And I am about to get busted. And I

06:30 front up to old Peggy O’Neil and he said, “I can’t help you, you are going to have to go before the CO.” And I thought “I am gone.” The day before I fronted [appeared before] the CO the signal comes through from British Brigade, which we are part of, saying : “Reference to charges against Mansford, tear them up. He was arrested by British military police without any Australian representatives present.” It was an illegal arrest, I was off

07:00 the hook. I was saved. And that all came about when ‘Breaker’ Morant [Australian trooper accused of killing prisoners] was executed by the Brits after the Boer War. After that the Australian government on Federation said, “No more will we put up with this nonsense, Australians will be tried by Australians arrested by Australians” unless there are certain clauses and so on. So I was laughing, I was thankful to ‘Breaker’ Morant. And today Dutchy

07:30 Holden and Frank Moffat swear blind I had friends in high places. That it was an injustice and I got off it. So that sums the soldiers’ approach to the British soldier and his hierarchy in Malaya, we tolerated each other is the best was of putting it.

And the Malayan police?

No I never saw much of them, the only time I saw the Malayan police was at

08:00 road blocks and cordon and search operations. There was nothing in common. We didn’t have anything in common. We certainly had the odd Malayan interpreter with us on patrols and in cordon and search operations, we got on very well with them, I mean they were part of the family. So it wasn’t because of

race or whatever, it was simply like the Poms, we were operating in different areas and

08:30 each to his own and that's the way it was. And we had Iboan trackers, they were the Dyaks from Borneo, you know, with the bones through their noses? They were our trackers. And they spoke very little English. But brilliant trackers and very much part of our family, and that's the association, anyone part of our family no matter who they were, they were one of us.

09:00 **Moving up the ranks, who decided that you are going to be the one promoted, how does that work?**

What from private to lance corporal and so forth? Well it is normally the platoon commander who is going to be promoted in his platoon and as you have no doubt gathered from the one I had, there was no way in the world I was going to get promoted while he was platoon commander. Which brings up an interesting

09:30 story, because later on in life when I was a lieutenant colonel visiting the Chief of Army who had just given me the job of raising the Battle School, he took me down to the officers' mess, and said, they did the normal courtesy from the senior man in the Australian Army, and the general said, "I have got George Mansford, he has come from up north, he is starting the Battle School, please make him feel welcome." And I went over to get a drink, second

10:00 round one for me, one for the general, he bought the first one. I say that so you know I am not snivelling to the general. And I look at this bloke at the bar and I spotted him straight away, he was my platoon commander and I won't go into details but he really sold me down the drain [betrayed me] to that contact we were talking about. And I said, "We have met before." And he said, "I don't think so." He had his name tag on, and I said, "You're the fellow

10:30 that was our platoon commander in Malaya." And he admitted it. And there was my opportunity, I outranked him and I could have really made him look like an idiot, and I didn't. I just said, "Good to see you again." And walked away. But the chance was there. I have always felt good since, that I didn't. So the platoon commander does that, and if your platoon commander doesn't do that

11:00 when you start talking about sergeants and corporals, unless you're noticed by the company commander you're not going to go anywhere, until they do. The system has changed a bit since then and they have other ways of doing it. but those days it was a bit primitive. Mind you, I didn't deserve to get promoted, I was very irresponsible in many ways when it came to discipline as far as the military was concerned,

11:30 I was a bit of a larrikin [noisy rebel]. And when I was promoted to lance corporal I was demoted as quick as I was promoted. And when I was promoted corporal I went on my second tour of duty, I was a corporal and I made sergeant on the way back on the troop ship, but there wasn't a sergeants' mess and by the time the boat got back I had gone to another battalion and I wasn't a sergeant any more. And years later when I went to that same battalion I was a company commander, a major by that stage,

12:00 and I went down to the sergeants' mess, and the RSM knew, he was an old mate of mine, and when I walked in he said, normal courtesies, "Gentlemen, Major Mansford, Company Commander of whatever company of the 1st Battalion. The only sergeant of the battalion never to set foot in our mess."

12:30 They just broke up [laughed], everyone knew the story. And that's true. Today I am the only sergeant of that battalion that was promoted to sergeant of that battalion that never set foot in the mess as a sergeant. For some people it is very hard to believe that I was commissioned [to officer], and they are probably still wondering at the success of it. But I keep saying to people the reason I went so high as far as the one

13:00 star was simply because people wanted to promote me, to get me out of the way.

Surely not, so when you came back to Australia you said you didn't do the officers' course but you did a knife and fork course, what does that mean?

I was in the 3rd Battalion at that stage and they were getting ready to go overseas and ended up in Borneo, which made me furious. But the CO said, "No you have already

13:30 done four years in Malaya. We're going to leave you behind and apart from that, you're going to do the knife and fork course" Which was at Canungra. The 'knife and fork course' was a very severe four or five weeks of assessment, not training but assessment, where they decided whether or not you were going to be capable of being an officer. So I had no choice, he left me behind. I could have thrown a tantrum and turned

14:00 around and said, "No." But I thought, "Well if they are not going to take me away with them I will go and do that," which I did. I think there was about twenty-three of us and there was about four of us got through. It was very severe, and so I then went back to the same battalion I was in at the time when I was a sergeant, only I was a lieutenant.

14:30 **You said that the assessments were difficult, what were they assessing you on, what were the specifics of what they were looking for?**

Well they would give you a very difficult military problems to make assessments on. If you were commanding what would you do in these circumstances and why? And you would do a paper on it and by that they would

15:00 confirm your standard of literacy or whatever. They would look at your personality and put you under immense pressure and see how you acted under immense pressure.

How would they put you under pressure?

Well they would walk you up and down hills all day so you were tired and could hardly speak, and then start abusing you or give you problems and demand answers immediately. Give you some people who were very difficult to command and you would have to get the best out of them. Some of it wasn't really fair.

15:30 I passed it, so I am not complaining, but I am thinking of others who didn't. So there was all of that, they would assess your current affairs, your understanding of international affairs. Your political views, if you had any and I didn't have any. I am apolitical, was then still am, always will be. So it was a very broad sense. They obviously knew,

16:00 I mean I had been in the military fourteen years in the ranks at that stage of the game and I had been through most of the ranks from private to sergeant several times, so it wasn't really testing your military knowledge or your military leadership at that level, it was just confirming how they thought you would perform as an officer and

16:30 hence the knife and fork, part of it was your social graces. And me and a mate up in the Tablelands, Barry Callagary, we blew it on day one really. We went into the mess and immediately started to get drunk. And our mates said, "You're done. You can't do that in the officers' mess." But obviously they made a different assessment and they thought, "Well these blokes are pretty honest, they are not hiding in the cupboard so to speak,

17:00 they're being what they are," and we were.

So if twenty-three went to that course and only four passed, did that mean that they needed more or did they know that there would only been a few that could get through?

They would have taken twenty-three, I assume they would have. Wouldn't have made sense to put people through that

17:30 expensive training assessment without doing that. The other logic is you could have twenty-three brilliant people so why would you get rid of nineteen of them, if you only needed four? Wouldn't make sense. Also it was the stage where the army was beginning to expand, that was 1964. The army is very clever.

18:00 They had the vision to see that we were going to get committed to Vietnam even though they were politically involved, they could see the writing on the wall. Hence when I was talking about a corporal commanding a platoon, that was no difficulty for me because whenever we did our training, if I was a private going for corporal rank, I would be required to not

18:30 only learn and understand how to command a section, I would also be required to learn how to command a platoon and I would have to have some understanding of the company level. Just like the Germans did before World War I. So army was thinking three up all of the time. So when I was a corporal and they suddenly said, "You're going to command the platoon on operations." No trouble, I had done it before,

19:00 the difference being I was still a corporal, so there was no distance between me and my mates. There doesn't have to be because Australian soldiers don't need all of that bullshit, they can react to orders more so from people they respect and like, than just simply the rank.

Were you a bit ambitious as well, or was it just because people saw the way you were? You naturally had the skills?

19:30 Well I don't know that I had the skills, but I think it was the latter, I wasn't ambitious at all. Initially, I wasn't ambitious for the army, I had the ambition to do six years and get out and study law and when I came home from Malaya the first time, I had already been to Korea and Malaya and I was twenty-two going on twenty-three and I went up to

20:00 what we called the repat [repatriation] mob, the rehabilitation mob you know look after veterans? And they said, "Well what do you want to do?" I said, " I want to go to uni [university], I want to study law." Because I had already matriculated [university entrance certificate] in my own time, that's what made me feasible for this knife and fork course. It obviously impressed the system that I had matriculated in my own time by

20:30 correspondence and so forth, under very difficult circumstances and I said, "I want to do law." And they laughed at me. And said, "No, the whole system has been revised, son. This is what we can do for you, we can give you a hundred and fifty dollars and kit you out as a butcher." It's true. "We can do this for you as a carpenter or whatever." And both of my wives used to say I

21:00 was a lover, not a carpenter. I was hopeless with saws, still am so I was a lover not a carpenter. And so they were the two options given to me which today still infuriates me when I think of all of these young men and women who leave the armed forces on the belief that the government is going to give them a chance, not look after them but give them a chance. That was my chance. After six years,

21:30 three on operational service, they were going to make me a butcher. So I told them to shove it. And that's when I went back. We were married then and I went back to Malaya and the interesting thing is if there was any ambition it might have started then. It was on that trip that I was a corporal in all sorts of strife,

22:00 on the way home I was a sergeant in a bit of trouble. I think my ambition started after I became an officer and even then it wasn't of great expectations, to steal the phrase. So I think I am long winded about this but I think it was the latter if there was any development for me, it was just fate or somebody above

22:30 me had more confidence in me than I believed I needed, as simple as that.

In terms of your personal life, you have been married for a few years, do you have children at this point?

When?

When you came back from your second tour?

Well my wife went with me, they lived in Penang, so yeah I was, I had four children, yeah I had two children

23:00 when I was getting out, when I was going to get out after six years I was twenty-three, two children. And of course I have got to say, going back to your question, there is no doubt in my mind that the two beautiful women in my life were very much an influence. This sounds like a bloody autobiography doesn't it? My first wife Maureen

23:30 she was the one who really got a grip of me and encouraged me to do the matriculation and so forth and she was the one that supported me when I went for that knife and fork course and of course after I lost her, by the time I lost her we had four children. And when I lost her they were all about that age, still infants. And then I met the second love of my life

24:00 and she arrived on the scene when I was a captain and she just took over from where Maureen left off, trimmed the rough edges and made sure I had the right outfits, set an example, perfect lady. And she was very much a part of my success in the officer corps going up through the ranks.

What was it like having your

24:30 **family in Malaya, how often were you able to see them?**

Rarely. I mean we would be out for six weeks, you would probably get four days off and go home and catch up. For wives in the military it is a very hard life, a very hard life. And I don't think there is any doubt that it helped the death of my first wife. I mean she was there when I went to

25:00 Korea as a sweetheart, she was there when I went to Malaya the first time and reading the casualties and all of the rest of the stuff. And she was there when I went to Vietnam. Immense strain, she was both mother and father and she had a heart attack at a very young age and there was no reason for it other than stress, I suppose.

So after you finished your knife and fork course, what happened next?

25:30 I went back to the same battalion I came from.

Is that unusual for that to happen?

Well it was the first time that I am aware of. I mean even 'Diver' Derek VC [Victoria Cross] and DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], they wouldn't let him back in the same battalion. And there could be another reason for that somebody probably said, "We're not game to put him anywhere else!" Those bastards sent him up, we can send him back to them.

26:00 So I went back to the same battalion and initially I was in the same company from whence I had come as a sergeant. and the two young officers who were there when I left, the company commander left and suddenly overnight I was commanding the company. So that caused a few sparks.

Was that an unusual feeling for you, and the men, to get used to?

I mean it is all very formal in the regular

26:30 army on parade and somebody would turn around and say, "Hey George what are we doing tonight?" And I would say, "For Christ's Sake you can't call me George on parade, you're going to get me in all sorts of strife." But they were very good, they were professionals. If there was difficulty it would be when I was orderly officer in Enoggera. You had this long street, it would be about eight hundred

metres along the main street, and the camp and the bastards would be lined up all along and as I went past they would be

27:00 saluting so you would wear your arm out saluting them. But they were very good, I have the highest regard for Australian soldiers, no one could ever question their love of life and professionalism.

Now that you had a higher rank and were commanding them, you had to change,

27:30 **was there any kind of shift within yourself that needed to happen?**

No because I think the fact is that I had already been doing that as a corporal and you learnt that pretty quickly, what you could and couldn't do. So I learnt that pretty quickly. So there was no trouble at all.

How would you describe your own personal leadership style?

28:00 Different. It's not the conventional way that you will get from R&C [Rest and Comfort], oddly enough I go back to lecture on leadership, they want me back there all of the time, on a voluntary basis I might add, in that they don't pay me the bastards. I enjoy it and to me it is a great honour because I didn't go to R and C and not many are invited, back

28:30 even amongst their own class. My style is different but I am smart enough to know the important elements of leadership, familiarity and everything else, and that's true. And I learnt a lot of my lessons from when I was a soldier and I often say it. Officers would call me "Mansford!," and I detested that, it was either

29:00 "Private Mansford, hey you or that fellow over there." Well many a time I got into trouble saying, "My name is George." Or whatever. And it was in Malaya with the platoon commander who was killed actually. As I walked up the hill he said, "You're blood's worth bottling George." That made my day. I was

29:30 suddenly recognised. That made my day. So as a brigade commander, some people used to have heart attacks over it, to me my soldiers were Billy or Fred or whatever, unless they were senior officers or the regimental sergeant major, I would say, "G'day RSM" even though he was an old mate. But to the young soldier "G'day Billy, how is your family?" "G'day Fred." I never had any problems, they didn't say, "All right George." So a

30:00 different approach. And I am not here to say that's a brilliant discovery. I am not saying it is the way to lead. I am just saying everyone has got their own style and I was smart enough to learn from so many brilliant leaders that commanded me at different times. I just took a bit from everyone without copying them.

It sounds like you believe in empowering your men by believing in them, or giving them that confidence just through recognition?

30:30 You have to. Recognition is everything. Recognition is saying, "You blokes have done well." Acceptance of responsibility is saying, "I have stuffed up." Not you have stuffed up, I have stuffed up. The difference between both is when you know they have stuffed up, you can turn around and say, "I accept responsibility for it, it is my stuff up but by God you blokes are now

31:00 going to sort yourselves out because of A B C D." And that's clever, that's the headshrinker approach, because they suddenly feel guilty about it. They have let the boss down, you don't have to say any more.

And they would know what they have done?

Soldiers always know what they have done, they know in advance what they have done. I mean I used to get that many youngsters come in front of me and they would give me a great story and I would say, "Well son, there is the good news and the bad news. The good news

31:30 is you have come up with a brilliant story a brilliant excuse. The bad news is I used to use the same bloody one myself. I find you guilty, a hundred dollar fine. March him out RSM." I am digressing I get a kick out of this. I was down lecturing at Brisbane not so long ago and the old regimental sergeant major, he said, "Sir you wouldn't remember me, I was a soldier at the Battle School when you first started and commanded it.

32:00 When we were out we were about five mile out and we were tired and hungry," because I always made sure they were, and he said, "I threw a piece of paper on the ground and I looked around and you were watching me and I thought oh my God I am gone. " Litter discipline was absolutely important. And he said, "You said nothing. And we ran all of the five miles back absolutely exhausted,

32:30 and that afternoon at about four o'clock and you said, 'Didn't you forget something?" he was a private soldier he said, "I am saying to myself, what did I forget, what is this silly old bastard on about?" and then I said to him, "You dropped a piece of paper well up the road about two hours out, you had better go and get it." So he had to go all of the way back out there, find the piece of paper report back to me and by

33:00 then it was about eleven o'clock at night, he had missed dinner. He had never forgotten it. And the final one without boring you, we always used to change everything at the Battle School because soldiers are

too smart, they can anticipate, so I would always change the exercises and it was always related to my own combat experience, the unexpected. About midnight they would get thrown out of their little tents and so forth and if they hadn't packed

33:30 properly that was tough. They would be on the road, and for the next twenty-four hours they would be marching, not eating, walking, running fighting, exhausted and by the time they got back to the camp, the final thing they did, they couldn't even think properly at this stage and that was deliberate, message from the runner and so forth, and they had to engage these targets, sit up targets. And this soldier was absolutely stuffed and he went to engage the target and he had a stoppage and the brain

34:00 snapped and he threw his weapon on the ground and said, "You can all get stuffed. I have had enough!" I said, "Charge him RSM." He said, "Yes sir charged blah, blah" That afternoon they're all dressed, they have all had their showers, they have all been paid, they are going to go back to the unit in Townsville; they are going to go out to the hotels, chase sheilas [girls], catch up with their beautiful wives, going to meet up with their families. And this bloke fronts me up and he has got a long face, it is not just a sad face it is one of defiance. You could pick it a mile up, I can pick it time and time again. And I thought, "Well you're

34:30 going to learn a lesson you will never forget son." Anyway the charges were read out and he has still got the long defiant face, I don't care what you do to me, you can fine me five hundred dollars, I am going home. I tore the charge sheet up and said, "Son I am not going to charge you. I don't want to spoil your record." And he broke into a big grin," I have beaten these bastards." I said, "What I am going to do with you, you're not going home you are going to stay with me and start the next course tomorrow. You're with me for another five weeks."

35:00 And that happened. And the word got around Australia within twenty-four hours, "Don't stuff around with 'Warrie' George" 'Warrie' George they used to call me, "Don't stuff around with 'Warrie' George, he did this to Billy Bloggs." "He couldn't do that?" "I am telling you, he did it." Never had a problem after that. And where does it come from? It comes from people like Saunders who demonstrated that there are other ways to discipline soldiers other than the formal black cap before you hang

35:30 them. He promoted me, that was his psyche. There was another fellow by the name of Sullivan just before Korea. We were out for the night and being a larrikin, three o'clock in the morning I get the flag pole and I put a pair of ladies panties on it. Nothing symbolic, I just put them up there, I wanted to be different. And as I looked around there is Joe Sullivan the company sergeant major he was then, and he said, "I will see you in the morning."

36:00 And he could have charged me, I could have been fourteen days confined to barracks and we had about four days before we left. For the next three nights, he let me off the last night before we went to Korea, the next three night from six o'clock to ten o'clock I had to walk around the flag pole with a baseball bat protecting the flag post. And

36:30 then from two o'clock to six o'clock I had to do the same. Tired, and of course the six to ten was clever because I couldn't get near the canteen. The boozer [bar] was closed by the time I finished the first shift. And there was others. When you read about the calling of the roll in Puckapunyal where a soldier tries to cover for his mate,

37:00 that was me. And the lesson learnt from that the sergeant in question made me call the roll for ever and ever, after that to explain what it was all about. So that's leadership. I don't think I am a good leader in that respect, I have been a fortunate leader and if anything I have the ability to understand the people underneath me and get the best out of them.

It must be pretty hard not to

37:30 **laugh sometimes when you catch people doing? I mean you must be a pretty good judge of human nature, you have got to anticipate how people are going to behave and act?**

You can do that you can anticipate. I mean it comes with the job. You can tell on operations when somebody is cracking. They won't joke any more, they will go silent. They might not be cracking, it might be a problem at

38:00 home. You can always tell that if they're not getting mail, in fact that is one of the first signs. If there is no mail for Billy Bloggs and you turn around to your sergeant or young officers or whatever and say, "Keep an eye on him. See if he gets mail in the next three or four days or week or two weeks." There were all sorts of signs. Moroseness, someone who is normally the clown suddenly clams up.

38:30 It is a sign of battle fatigue, their wife has left them, their girlfriend has found somebody else, or whatever.

Is there a fine line sometimes between breaking men and making them? You have to sort of break down certain parts of their personality, is that a hard thing to know how to do or?

I think you have got to be careful, it takes experience.

39:00 Well you certainly don't break anyone but you can embarrass them, you can humiliate them, you can appeal to them. There is all sorts of those methods you can use, depending on how tough the egg is to

crack. Humiliation is the last one you need to use. But there has been the odd occasion when it has been necessary, particularly when it is somebody in the bully line. But equally

39:30 there is other standards you see, for all of that flippancy and humour, I sacked two lieutenant colonels one after the other just like that, even though it was not good for the battalion and not good for the brigade because the morals were there and the ethics were there, they had disobeyed them. It involved women; the first one tried to rape a girl. Gone. The other

40:00 one was being very suggestive to a girl and I just told him, "If you're guilty of that my advice is you resign today, because I am going to investigate and if I find there is any evidence there I am going to have you court-martialled." He resigned the same day. So it was easy for him, easy for the brigade and less uncomforting for the girl involved, got rid of it. So that was breaking, I suppose.

40:30 And those sorts of things happen. But they're rare, I find most people react very well to discipline.

Tape 7

00:30 **You were commissioned to the rank of lieutenant, what occurred during the two years before you went to Vietnam?**

Well I went back to the same company, in the 2nd Battalion

01:00 and shortly after I arrived back there they split the battalion right down the middle to form the 6th battalion as well as maintain the 2nd. And I was part of that element that moved over. And I was one of the original members of 6 RAR 6th Battalion the Long Tan fellows and that was on June 5th 1965, day before D-Day.

01:30 **This is part of the army's expansion we're talking about?**

Yes it was.

With the fore vision of?

I was commanding an assault pioneer platoon and we were getting ready to go to Vietnam at the 6th Battalion when Graham Belleville, the fellow I told you about before, we tried to stow away together, he was killed in an ambush with the Training Team. And because I

02:00 had already been selected for the Training Team I was next cab off the rank so I went and took his place and ended up in Vietnam as a captain. So within two years of being a sergeant I was then a captain.

Can you give us an understanding of your impressions of what the Training Team was, and the job that they were doing?

Well I might be

02:30 boring you and your listeners but the Training Team was the most decorated unit in Australians history, four VCs Victorian Crosses. It was spread from the DMZ, in Vietnam all of the way down to the Mekong Delta, in the early days when it first started in '63 they were given a training role but it very quickly became a combat role. And by the time we were over there, we had advisers scattered all over the place,

03:00 some with Special Forces, some with Rangers, some with Regional Forces and some with Vietnamese Army and the odd one in the headquarters or whatever. And their job was basically to provide advice and assist in the development of the unit. The reality was it became obvious that they were there to provide

03:30 the fire support and air strikes and so forth whenever it hit the fan.

So they were working in a liaison role between the American forces and the people they were training, was that right?

Well depending on where they were. If they were with Special Forces they became part of that American Special Forces, and that American Special Forces reacted to their own

04:00 special force headquarters in Mi Trang.

So they were actually advising American forces?

No, they were part of the Special Force team.

The government committed them as trainers or advisers to the South Vietnamese Army, is that right?

Well they did as trainers but as time went on that all got shot under the door. When the first team went

over there,

04:30 there was specific instructions not to get involved in combat. Well we lost out first adviser in ’63, Sergeant Bill Hacking, he was killed on operations, he shouldn’t have been there, he was training, but there was a bit of a hoo-ha [row] about that, but as the war went on it became obvious that Australian advisers could not be divorced from combat, so they became part of it. Hence four Victoria Crosses.

05:00 And I think it averaged out that everyone on the team averaged about one point five or two point two medals for bravery each. Which brings up an interesting point which might disappoint you, I didn’t get any. So that must infer that I was obviously the team coward.

It doesn’t disappoint me, does it disappoint you?

No I always use, as a

05:30 reminder to them, they must have spent too much bloody time around parade grounds.

Were all of the advisers officers?

No the bulk were warrant officers, which is the rank above sergeant. The bulk were warrant officers, the next significant number were captains, with the odd major. The majors generally speaking were in administrative jobs, although one of them won a Victoria Cross.

06:00 And then you had your lieutenant colonels, there was about a hundred on the team, and I would say at a guess maybe seventy of them were warrant officers and fifteen captains, and the odd staff at headquarters in Saigon.

Can you tell me about the advisory position that you went into?

I did two jobs. First of all I took over from

06:30 Graham Belleville. The interesting thing was that the bloke who took over from me was a friend of mine too, Karl Baudestil and he was killed too. So I was in the middle and the two warrant officers who took over from me in Bien Hoa didn’t listen to me and they were killed. My first job was at a place called Duc Mi Ranger Training Centre which was a cosy job in the beginning in that you were simply

07:00 advising in the training of Rangers being the Special Forces, Vietnamese Rangers. There are blokes that were supposed to travel lightly armed like commandos, but there is a question mark on all of that. But in the process of doing that there was a need to get out there in the field with each platoon that you were training and be out there with them on operations advising

07:30 them to see how they were going. Some pretty hairy [frightening] experiences. I can recall one where I got a new warrant officer straight out of Australia, and being a bit critical, he wasn’t physically fit and that night we were camped and we came under attack, that afternoon and he wasn’t there because we had made a long approach march, and nobody knew where he was, he was missing. So we have got all of these bad guys around and I had to go back

08:00 out and try to find him by myself. And about forty minutes down the track I found him, it was probably as scared as I have ever been. So I found him suffering from heat stroke and everything and brought him back in and of course everyone is shooting at everybody. They were the sorts of circumstances. There was another time with another fellow who was later killed Geoff Scott, I was

08:30 with an under strength platoon Rangers you know lightly armed, gung-ho, and there is Geoff and me and we ran into this village, and they made a big song and dance of us, this is in 2 Corps, up near Min Hoa, a place in the mountains and they said, through the interpreter they were saying we were the first white men they had seen since the French. And I said, “That can’t be right,

09:00 you have obviously had security forces.” And they said, “No, we have had nobody.” The intelligence was all totally wrong and we were in bad fellow [Viet Cong] country very much. “Now that you’re here we feel liberated, the Viet Cong come in virtually every night and surround the village and take some of your young people away and indoctrinate us.” and so forth. In the meantime the curry chicken they cooked for us wasn’t very appetising.

09:30 So I said, “We have got to get out of here.” And so just on last light we took off and you could hear the dogs barking around the camp which meant that they were already on their way, we didn’t make it. We found this old French fort all overgrown, so we positioned ourselves around that and during the night the bad guys came past us, just past us. And I was praying to God that no one would open fire, there was only a few of us and there was a lot of them.

10:00 Radio wasn’t working and we were out of range of artillery and all of the rest of the stuff. Next morning they were gone because we owned the day and they owned the night, so to speak, and but they had burnt the old fellow’s hut down and he was taken away, never saw him again. I felt pretty bad about that. So they were the sorts of things. And after that I joined a Ranger battalion that was operating in meeting emergencies so to speak

10:30 and ended up down near the Australian battalion Task Force, in the Nui Dat Hills and so forth and then from there I went to a place called Binh Ba which became the scene for a big battle between the

Australians and the North Vietnamese later on. Binh Ba was an outpost really, it was an approach to the Task Force, and the

11:00 theory was we would get hit first, and probably overrun, but it would give the Task Force adequate warning, so I was there for about six months as well, which was the Regional Popular Force. So I went from one extreme where you had lots of priorities, to the other where you had to fend for yourself. We had to even steal our own bloody vehicle off the Yanks.

11:30 **When you turned up for your first position at Ranger training, who were you taking your orders from?**

From an American colonel.

And did you have Americans under you?

Yeah I did, I had a couple of sergeants and a warrant officer and I had another fellow captain working with me, a fellow by the name of John Kingsley, he was later killed. Yeah, so we had it was integrated infrastructure.

12:00 **And you were training the South Vietnamese Army Rangers in the style that the Americans trained their Rangers?**

Yes except that we had a pretty big influence, well I did. We introduced a lot of Australia techniques and training programs and so forth.

Can you talk about a couple of the conflicts between the Australian style and the American style that you might have encountered?

12:30 Basically it was really of question of fire and manoeuvre drills and the Americans relied a lot on fire power, straight up the guts and let's get it over with. Where we would say, "Well before we do that, let's find which is the best way to crack this egg." Our emphasis was on lives, unnecessary casualties and the Americans for other reasons

13:00 decided that wasn't as important. They didn't have the same sort of understanding and knowledge of terrain that we had. Equally we didn't have their understanding of the immense fire power that could be brought onto a position, so there was a balance, but we brought a lot to it.

Did that lead to any tensions or conflict between you and your boss?

13:30 No not all. They were very responsive to our ideas, and we were the diplomats so, we knew we were in a foreign country and working with other allies so it wasn't all God damn we know more that you. The approach getting back to Michelle's [interviewer] question before about leadership, letting them think it was all their idea. And that was part of it. I mean in essence we were concentrating more on the individual and the small team and they were

14:00 concentrating more on the larger team and the group activity, and our argument was which was pursued, it is far better to have an asset that can think for itself and do things.

And what about challenges you faced in terms of teaching the Vietnamese, were the communication difficulties with their levels of enthusiasm or skill levels, fitness?

14:30 Only when they didn't want to do what you were telling them to do. And sometimes that happened with rank. Asians didn't like losing face so you had to be very careful how you went about that.

Can you give an example?

It is hard at the moment, to turn around and say to a major through an interpreter who claimed he didn't know English but you knew he did. For example, "The troops should not be doing

15:00 that they should be doing that." They lose face, their troops are listening in and that's a silly approach so you pull him aside – and even that would be a silly approach, you are telling this Chinaman or Vietnamese how to run his army. So the other approach is, "Listen cobber [friend] I have been watching this, and it is very good, but what if you thought about adding this or

15:30 that to it? You would really make the troops under your command really first class." "Good idea. Go and do it." "Well done major, gee that's a great idea." He knows what it was, but you played the game.

So do you think the authorities in Australia who were selecting the advisory team were selecting them as much for their diplomatic skills?

16:00 I don't know.

It is an important element of the job though wasn't it?

I would say they did. Before we even went near the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam] course, the advisers' course, we went through some very demanding psych tests and questions and, "Which way does the cog turn?" and, "If you had this situation how would you do it in practical applications?" And there was a fallout from that,

16:30 fallout being rejects who didn't get past that. Your IQs [intelligence quotients] came into it. And then the next step was Canungra itself, physically demanding, lot of fall outs from that. Although that tended to reduce later on in life, later when the war was reaching its peak in casualties and so forth. And then further assessment and briefings in the intelligence centre, down in Sydney's North Head.

17:00 So there was a filtering process and I have got to say none of it worried me and I don't think it worried many of the others either. If they didn't want you, stuff them, sooner or later you would go with the battalion anyway.

Can you tell me a bit more about the training course you had to perform?

It wasn't unlike the course an infantry

17:30 company would do, except that it was more demanding individually, as opposed to collectively. They weren't interested in your collective skills, they were interested in your individual reactions and skills, clearly on the team you're going to be working just like that. It was all physical in the field, it was all related to mental and practical application of your profession in the field. It was very demanding.

18:00 **Quite the opposite end of the spectrum compared to your early experiences where you were moulded into being a solid part of your team as an infantryman. Here you were operating as an individual?**

You could say it is the difference between an infantry section and being selected for Special Forces. I mean the emphasis in SAS [Special Air Services] for example, on individuality as well as your ability to work as part of a

18:30 small team. I can understand where they were coming from. I mean, because you were going to virtually work in isolation, you had to be able to work and perform by yourself in a hostile environment without relying on a team. And that in itself was pretty demanding I can tell you. Binh Ba for example, we were Regional Forces,

19:00 I was supposed to have a hundred and sixty, I had about seventy. When I arrived there they were all poorly equipped, weapons were rusty and they were indifferent, and we were out of the artillery range and I was getting all of these reports, a chopper would come in each afternoon at one stage. "An NVA [North Vietnamese Army] regiment is camped just outside your backyard and intelligence reckons they're going to attack you

19:30 tomorrow night." And you knew bloody well if you had that sort of force attacking you, you were gone. All I could do was dig in and the philosophy I was telling my mates, two warrant officers, that if they come we just stand and fight because there is no way out. That plays on your mind. That becomes very demanding. And then of course the chopper [helicopter] whops away and nothing happens, and then

20:00 two days later they are back with a fresh report. What they were saying was right in the long term but it happened after I left, they attacked Binh Ba after I left and that's where one of the battalions, a regiment came up with tanks and APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and really did it over like a dinner, the battle of Binh Ba. So I think that was all about the selection process and certainly when I was an instructor at

20:30 Canungra after I had done my tour of duty in Vietnam with the team, it was obvious that that's what it was all about, because we were all involved in it.

Can I ask you to rate the South Vietnamese forces you were training, the Rangers you were training?

How?

Rate them as soldiers against the Australians and the Americans?

Well it is a hard assessment because we have got to remember the South Vietnamese

21:00 had been at war for years, and for some of the young men and women they had been at war since before they were born. With the French and now the Second Indochina War. They were very brave soldiers, often poorly led and quite frankly in a lot of cases the motivation wasn't there. More so towards the finish, because they could see

21:30 what they would define as the betrayal, the fact that everyone had left them and gone home.

How could their motivation be nowhere when it is their land they are fighting for?

Well because they would attack and take a village and lose casualties doing it, and then they would send in all of the aid and so forth and then leave and then a day after they left the Viet Cong would

22:00 be back there again. The motivation was there when they would be in camp in a unit operating there, and they would get a message that their family has just been killed in Hue, massacred by Viet Cong. Or somebody else has been bombed by an American plane. Hard to motivate people in your own place, it was pretty common stuff. In fact one of the captains I worked with and

22:30 his wife, beautiful woman. I brought over a little koala bear from Australia, you know one that played Waltzing Matilda and I had it here, I have just given it away to my daughter. His mother was an artist in Hue, she painted this beautiful sketch of me in uniform and slouch hat. In the Tet Offensive she and her husband were just taken away hands tied behind their back by the Viet Cong and murdered. That didn't motivate him,

23:00 other than revenge and so forth, but when he was away he was worrying about his own wife and child and from all reports all three of them were killed after I left. So there is all of that. There comes a point of despondency or futility that says, "Why are we doing this?" Great tragedy

23:30 and another tragedy is that it plays on a lot of us that we left them and we deserted them.

Would you say that the South Vietnamese were equal in guerrilla warfare to the North Vietnamese, was there any great disparity between those two armies?

Well they have both got the same genes.

In their skills?

I don't think there was any problem there I think it was just a question of leadership. And when you talk about motivation I mean General Giap

24:00 and Ho Chi Minh were far more capable of motivating than the five or six different prime ministers who were all assassinated or whatever down in Saigon. I mean there was a lot of instability, it was very poorly done.

In hindsight do you feel you were training the South Vietnamese Army in the best way possible?

24:30 Absolutely. We were training them to kill people, simple as that. Military operation to secure ground, to kill destroy to win. But that was the military aim. There was also a political aim, we had nothing to do with the politics of it. and as the Vietnamese were not stupid, they are very intelligent people, they could see what was happening in the United States and Australia with demonstrations and so forth, they could see that so there has to come a time when they say,

25:00 "Where do I stand with protection of my family?" And Hue was a very evident demonstration to me of the North Vietnamese saying, "This is what is going to happen to you bastards when we take over." They killed thousands and thousands at Hue. Civilians, just butchered them.

So you arrived in 1965?

'66.

25:30 **The Rangers you were training, what would you describe as their strengths and weaknesses?**

Well the strengths are obviously that they were fighting for their country, what they believed in. Equally the weakness to counter to that is that a lot of them were conscripts that didn't want to be there, which is interesting when you compare with our conscripts, because every one of our conscripts, with very few exceptions volunteered to go to Vietnam.

26:00 And it is a misnomer that they were dragged on the ships.

Sorry can you explain that?

The general word is that our conscripts were conscripted and had to fight in Vietnam. The reality is that very few went there that didn't have to go. Virtually all conscripts that went there volunteered they wanted to go. Some even signed on to make sure they did go there. And we had also a filter system in Canungra, I was

26:30 SI [Senior Instructor] of the Battle Efficiency course, senior instructor. If there were soldiers there that weren't performing they failed, they didn't go to Vietnam, be they regulars or conscripts. If somebody walked into my office, be he regular or conscript, and said, "I don't want to go. I am a conscientious objector. I am not convinced of this." Out, gone because we didn't want people there who weren't motivated.

27:00 In Vietnam, whether they were motivated enough they got conscripted, and they even got sent to things like Rangers which should have been totally voluntary. The weaknesses were that they were obviously put into battle too often. They were often put into battles that they couldn't win. They were put into battle under poor leadership. There was a lot of instability in the country, these are all of the disadvantages.

27:30 **Is that they had had many years of fighting experience, but no real structure to train leaders?**

Well they had a system to train but the training was very primitive. They had lots and lots of battle experience, but they also had lots and lots of heavy casualties. So a lot of their leaders were gone, there

28:00 was a new generation of leaders that weren't around to see the next generation. It was the blind leading the blind on many occasions. They were very brave, very skilled in some battalions. Again it depends on

your leadership. In the south the leadership was basically on who you knew, and what was rich, and everything else. Up in North Vietnam it was who was best for the job. There is a subtle difference.

28:30 Peasant Nao Ji from North Vietnam could be commanding the regiment because he is a bloody good soldier. Not because he was the Lord Mayor of Saigon's cousin or whatever.

There was also a problem I read about that amongst the officer corps, it was not culturally correct to know or learn more than your senior officers?

29:00 Well that's the Asian way, it is not smart to, it is like that explanation that I made to you before, let them think it is their own idea, very sensitive. Again I go back to that young lieutenant I was talking about, Captain Roy, Lieutenant Roy, brilliant but he wasn't going anywhere because he didn't belong to the right caste or whatever.

29:30 I mean I assume he is dead now, I assume he got killed as a lieutenant and not a major even though he was around for several years later.

What did you see as your greatest challenge in terms of training that army?

The greatest challenge I had in Vietnam was coming home alive. That was the first requirement and there was

30:00 no doubt I would have been very cranky obviously if I hadn't have been able to achieve that. But the greatest challenge for me was that the unit at Binh Ba was able to operate after I left and it was capable of doing that. I mean I have just written an article for our association which talks about the dirty rifles and so on when I arrived,

30:30 and indifference, but when I left there was a rickety old bamboo pole with their national flag going up every morning, and even though it wasn't Coldstream Guards [British elite troops] it was "present arms" to their flag and their weapons were oiled and they were clean. More numbers and more weapons, and there was a defensive position there that we had built that they could defend themselves from and fight from.

31:00 So that was my biggest challenge and in doing that we had to steal from the Task Force, we had to steal a vehicle from the Yanks. Which is an interesting story because on one of our stealing operations we got picked up by the American MPs [military police] and one of my warrant officers in the back he was drunk, it was his turn to get drunk. And they said, "That warrant officer in the back is drunk." And I said, "He had better be. I told the bastard to get drunk." And they couldn't understand that coming from an Australian captain.

31:30 And they said, "Sir, you are going down the street the wrong way." It was a one way street and we were going the wrong way. And I said to them, "We are just down from an outpost at Binh Ba, we are down here for the day." It was enough but it was a stolen vehicle, one of their vehicles, red hot stolen. And when I left Binh Ba I said to the two warrant officers who took over, they weren't replacing me with an officer, Baudestil,

32:00 the bloke I was telling you about before, instead of coming where I was went further north and he was killed. And I said to them, "Whatever you do don't set a pattern in your runs which are rare from here down to the Task Force. There is only one road from here through the rubber and you know it is too dangerous, you won't make it if you set a pattern." Well they did and they were both killed in an

32:30 ambush, old Charlie [Viet Cong] was waiting for them. So the greatest achievement was Binh Ba and the most important one was getting out of there with my hair and my warrant officers. If there was a disappointment it was that the warrant officers that took over from me didn't, but there was nothing I could do about that.

Did the Team ever all come together, at any point, while you were there?

Anzac Day at Da Nang we got together. And there is a funny story there,

33:00 Jack Morrison [Distinguished Conduct Medal and Bar] and Jack was around and we would play two-up [gambling game] and have a few beers and then everyone would go back scattered all over the countryside, Anzac Day was our day that we would all get together, unless somebody was on operation. Anyway one of those occasions the two up, Jack had one of the American jackets and he cleaned everybody

33:30 up in two up and he has got money stashed all over him and he went back to his Vietnamese unit the next night and they got attacked by NVA the next day and got overrun. When they got down to the bottom of the hill Jack reorganised the survivors and they counter attacked and took the hill again. And the next reunion we had there were several of us that got together and narked [teased] old Jack and said, "Jack the only reason you went back up that hill was because you had left your jacket there,

34:00 with all of the money in it." He got a Distinguished Conduct Medal for that. So you know the other thing about Vietnam, some of the sad memories being on the hill on Christmas Day during the truce with a mate of mine from Korea who was a major at that stage and he was all

34:30 excited, he was just leaving Task Force headquarters to take over a company in one of the battalions. And it was Christmas Day and beer was slow, we couldn't get any beer from anywhere because we were on an isolated position. And we had this black duck, Emu Beer, one can of Emu Beer between us. Rusty, hot. And one old tin of meat between us. No mail because the posties [postal workers] were going slow and

35:00 we toasted each other with the one can, sipping our Merry Christmas. I was going home and forty-eight hours later he was killed. I never did see his widow for a number of reasons, different directions. But on the Welcome Home Parade I went down to that on that ceremony the laying of the wreaths, on his name she came forward and laid a wreath but

35:30 I didn't go near her, she was too upset. That was very sad that. A few others, I mean I was there the day before Long Tan [a key battle for Australians in Vietnam]. I had taken time off from 2 Corps to go down and see my old battalion. Charles Mollison wanted me to go out with him on his patrol that ended up running to the rescue of Long Tan. I was all set to go except then the CO, thank God, rang me and said, "I heard

36:00 you are in Nui Dat. Get back to your unit in a hurry." Which I did and the next day Long Tan occurred. I spent the night before with Harry Smith and his mob and I can still see the Delta company boys, they were having a big concert and Harry was talking about how there was, "No VC around there, not like you blokes have got up north." And I said, "Don't worry about it Harry, they will find you sooner or later." And that night they mortared the place and the next day

36:30 he went out there. I was talking about, on the funny side, we came home and when I eventually remarried I was with the 1st Battalion company commander and we were getting ready to go back to Vietnam on another tour of duty, and of course in those days you always had to go through Canungra.

37:00 And so I went down to Canungra with the company, I was a major then. We came out of the bush after four weeks, dirty, tired, clothes are torn and hungry. And we got on the main road and a car pulled up and said, "General Westmoreland – you know the boss in Vietnam? [William Westmoreland – US Commander in Vietnam] He is visiting Australia and he has just made a surprise visit to Canungra and he wants to see some Australian soldiers. He is very impressed with Australian soldiers and seeing you blokes are going back, he wants to see you." Westmoreland turns up

37:30 with his entourage, press cameras and TV, and General MacDonald who was GOC [General Officer Commanding] Northern Command, he is there with his entourage. Westmoreland comes up and shakes hands, and I introduce myself. And he said, "How many have you got in your company?" I said, "A hundred and twenty sir." And he said, "I understand you have got conscripts?" I said, "Half and half sir, half regular half conscripts." And he said, "Is that a problem?" and I said, "No sir, because they have all volunteered for Vietnam, regular and National Service."

38:00 And he said, "I am very impressed with that, can I see them?" So there they are in three ranks, rigidly at attention, all in combat gear, disciplined soldiers. And we are walking up the front rank and Westmoreland stops in the middle of the front rank to talk to this soldier, a little fellow I can still see him. And the light came on, little warning light came on because I had never seen this fellow before in my life. As it turns out he was a reinforcement and he arrived the week before

38:30 and the CSM had put him in one of the platoons. He was a cook from admin [administration] company and they had to do their training too. And General Westmoreland said, "Tell me son, are you regular or National Service?" And he said, "I am National Service sir." And he said, "Oh that's good, your company commander tells me you're all volunteers and you can't wait to get to Vietnam." And this young bloke says, this miserable cook says, "I have never heard so much bullshit in all my life." He said, "I have done

39:00 twenty-two months in this circus, two months to go before I am back in civvie street and I can't wait to get out of this bloody clown mob!" And General Westmoreland's mouth shuts, General McDonald's mouth opens and the rage, you can see his hair standing up and the cameras are clicking and the TV cameras are whirring and Westmoreland didn't ask not one other soul. So my

39:30 claim to fame when you talk about ambition, my claim to fame had just gone suddenly down the gurgler [drain] I could see it in the headlines the next day, 'National Serviceman rebukes Westmoreland' or 'Soldier tells Westmoreland to get stuffed! National Serviceman refuses to go'. And Macdonald is looking at me as if to say "Mansford, you will never

40:00 get beyond major." They are the breaks. He was a soldier and as I said later on to him, "You're a soldier and you're entitled to give your complaint to any senior officer going, but why the bloody hell didn't you tell me or keep your mouth shut, you little bastard?" So there you go. When we talk about instant replay and instant news and

40:30 satellites, it was happening then but imagine it now, there would be replays of it all day. So that probably summed up Vietnam. I have never regretted going there, most of my mates have never regretted going there. We are very bitter still to this day about the fact that when we went there confetti was thrown on us and it was a landslide victory for the Libs [governing Federal Liberal Party] because they

41:00 had introduced National Service and we had committed there, and yet a short time after that our wives

were being abused, and the difficulty of returning. I can recall I was out on patrol at Binh Ba being shelled by our own artillery, accidentally, but being shelled by our own artillery, and forty-eight hours later watching my son play football at a barbecue.

41:30 I couldn't adjust. And what made it harder was people would say, "Where have you been George?" "I just got back from Vietnam." They didn't say, "Oh, well done," or anything like that. Or, "Glad to see you back." It was just, "Hey Fred, pass us another beer." As if I had been down to the butcher's.

Tape 8

00:30 **When you got to Vietnam the training had already been going for a while. What did these training camps look like, were they a permanent camps or were they basic?**

Well the Ranger training camp? That was a

01:00 permanent feature with an area for the soldiers being trained, an area for the instructors advisers and it was surrounded by mine fields and wire machine gun posts and arc mesh around to prevent rocket attacks coming in, the theory being they would detonate on the arc mesh. So that was basically it. Within that camp you

01:30 had your kitchen and so forth, so it was relatively comfortable in regards infantry terms.

How many South Vietnamese soldiers would you have there at any one time going through the camp?

Well there was two elements. There was the South Vietnamese army which were trained by other American elements and the Rangers. We would train one battalion at a time.

02:00 And depending on the nature of that battalion, sometimes they had just come out of combat. So you know that would be a relatively easy three weeks course, four weeks maybe, and sometimes it was just refresher where they would get two weeks. In either case we would do the training and then go out on operations with them into the field.

02:30 **So would they fight in a platoon or how many would go out and fight?**

Well the whole concept of Rangers, it is an American term, was to, they're a cross between SAS and commandos in that they do reconnaissance. Travel lightly and do quick raids and so forth.

03:00 The reality is in Vietnam they were totally outmatched, the heaviest weapon they had was a Browning automatic rifle or a thirty calibre machine gun. And it was limited back up, they were a conventional battalion and so it wasn't difficult for them to get outgunned. And the other stupid thing about it which I quickly identified, they were being misemployed.

03:30 When I left, Rangers would be used to react as reaction forces, so if there was a town under siege for example or a garrison or outpost, these blokes would race up to relieve it and more often than not they would go by vehicle and more often than not they would be the target because the town or the outpost was just bait to get these blokes onto the road in the killing ground, and these blokes would be decimated.

04:00 Sometimes they would go by chopper and they would go into the obvious landing zones where the Viet Cong were waiting. They took terrible casualties in that regard and it bled the Ranger elite dry. And I could never understand why. If you're going to do that, then they needed to be equipped differently with different weapons and so forth.

04:30 They did it at Hue, they were the reaction force for Hue and when I was operating with them they were always a reaction force and the fall guy really, based on the stupidity that because they were a Ranger corps they were invulnerable and bullet-proof and they weren't.

What equipment did they have and did that dictate a

05:00 **different way of fighting for them compared to what Australian soldiers would have?**

They had American equipment, they had the same communication set up. The biggest difference being the South Vietnam Army, and that includes the Rangers and so on, were covering all of Vietnam, and not all of

05:30 Vietnam is rainforest., there was lots of open terrain which could be murderous. Whereas our blokes in the main were in the rainforest and we were very good in the rainforest, in the jungle and we could hold our own. Americans were a bit critical of the Australians in that they sometimes suggested we weren't looking for a fight, because the Australians would move along not on tracks,

06:00 stopping and listening and waiting to pick up sounds. Well it speaks for itself – I mean Phuoc Tuy where the Australians were, we defeated the enemy in Phuoc Tuy, the enemy were beaten, it is a historical

fact. They never did come back until the Australians were pulling out in Phuoc Tuy. They tried it in Long Tan, and got done [beaten].

06:30 And they tried again in the Tet Offensive in Ba-ria, and did a little bit of damage and they got done again, at Binh Ba, on the three occasions where they tried to take the Australians on they got bloody noses, and of course all of those small patrols and so forth that occurred in the jungle. There was a difference in our approach to it and the Vietnamese were more imitating the

07:00 Americans, and understandably, I mean they were being led by Americans, basically in most cases. They weren't up to it. Not because they weren't brave or up to it, but there was a continual dilution of their ranks in casualties and so forth, I don't think they ever recovered from it.

I just wondered if the enemy would ever change their tactics in how they were fighting

07:30 **and whether that intelligence would come back to you in passing on information of new things to look for?**

Well we used to get intelligence briefs, but they were mainly about the enemy attacked an outpost and this is the techniques that they used. And there was a common theme, more often than not, there was an ambush between the place they attacked and the relief going for them.

08:00 But the system never woke up to it, common sense would tell you that if you were in their [the VC's] shoes that's exactly what you would do yourself, draw them into the killing ground. But there were examples of them using the Ho Chi Minh Trail more often than they had in the past. There were some examples they were infiltrating the infrastructure in some of the

08:30 villages. Some which could be acted upon and some couldn't. And there was examples of telling Georgie Mansford there was a North Vietnamese regiment outside Binh Ba about to do him over again. I mean, that was the other intelligence, when I look back I think it was deliberately injected by the bad guys to try and destroy us morally and mentally.

What effect did that have on you, that news?

09:00 Well as I was saying before there was nothing you could do. I knew if the intelligence was right, well you had better start crossing yourself [asking for divine help]. We didn't have the artillery support, all we could rely on was a quick reaction from the Task Force and that would be slow

09:30 because the Australians weren't stupid, they weren't going to come charging up the road to relieve us, they were going to come cross country and that would take time. And so as I said I had two advisers I would say, "Listen boys this is it. We had better get ready. We have got ammunition here, and ammunition there and if we get over run there, we can fall back and do this and that." So it was positive in that respect, we were going to stay and fight, we weren't just going to get overrun, we had our fall back positions

10:00 inside the outpost, on the assumption that someone would come to the rescue, like 7 Cav [Cavalry].

Did you feel like you had enough weapons and equipment there if you were?

Well we did but part of the whole problem was that the people that provided us administrative support were at a place called Ba-ria and it was controlled by the province chief, and we were the victims

10:30 of a common gimmick. Instead of having a hundred plus [soldiers at your disposal] you had seventy plus of what we called dead soldiers. They had been killed and not replaced and the province chief was still picking up their pay and the money for their rations and so forth. So they were becoming quite rich and if they reinforced us then some of our income would disappear. I took it higher but it was

11:00 too corrupt, they brought in one of his cousins or something from Saigon to investigate it and he went away and nothing ever happened. So we had to steal, steal our claymores [mines] or borrow or beg from 6 Battalion who I knew very well as an old member of the battalion We stole a vehicle as I said, we did a lot of things, we stole some fifty cals [50 calibre heavy machine guns] from the armoured cavalry, mob in Vung Tau.

11:30 But we got by. It goes back to that question, the most important objective was to survive and keep my people alive.

I am just wondering how you got supplies through, who was responsible for that?

We didn't, that's why we got that vehicle I was telling you about, we would run the road and go down to Nui Dat, to the Australian Task Force and get some

12:00 fresh rations and load up with combat rations and so forth.

So you just had one vehicle to do the whole camp and everything?

Every now and again there would be a truck load or a convoy would come through for the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] or the RF/PF [Regional Force/Popular Force] element. Of course they had their wives and children in the outpost too.

12:30 **How did that affect you doing your jobs having families there?**

It did a great deal, I mean with little kids around and you have got minefields and so forth. They became clever about it. They were the children, there seemed to be a gap between kids who would be curious and teenagers or whatever. They were only youngsters, they were the babes and infants

13:00 because they obviously palmed the rest off to their families in the big cities. But they had their families and their little hootchies there. And the company commander of the Vietnamese Force applied his discipline. There was a big bamboo cage that they went into and barbed wire cage which they would have to stand in, if you moved you would cut yourself. I didn't like that but it was their way, not my way. It was the same as the Koreans when you went on operations with them, they were

13:30 very brutal and when something went wrong the company commander would belt, and I mean belt, the platoon commander. Several around the head. He in turn would belt and kick the platoon sergeant, he in turn would belt the three corporals and they in turn would take to their squads with sticks. It was unbelievable and yet people tell

14:00 me they are such a magnificent army. Didn't impress me. And with that sport of brutality there was also brutality out in the field. Fortunately I was never exposed to that I often wonder what I would have done I wasn't with them. I saw enough of the potential for it in their own troops.

What did you know about the hill tribes, the Montagnards?

Well they were like the Malaysian Saki,

14:30 nomads, they were the people who lived out there they had their own tribes and culture. They had been looked down upon by the South and North Vietnamese for centuries. They had been fragmented, they had been neglected, they had been abused. And so the Americans saw them as a potential friend and they used to gather, what we used to call the

15:00 'yards', they would grab them into the Special Forces and the team would command them, they were like the Rangers, they were used for Special Forces, reaction forces, mobile forces without and due regard to tactics or whatever. And they suffered heavy casualties. Of course when it was all over, when North Vietnam invaded, one wonders what happened with the tribal system.

15:30 **So would they not fight with the South Vietnamese, were they kept apart?**

No they fought alongside Vietnamese and South Vietnamese, but the nature of their operation more often than not put them separate. They would by used like the Rangers, to go and relieve a force or act as an individual identity. But I

16:00 didn't serve with the Montagnards, but a lot of my mates did. They spoke highly of them and also spoke of the bigotry that existed with the Vietnamese in regards to Montagnards.

16:30 **I think that was about the end of my questions on Vietnam. I was just wondering if you could describe for the records the dates that you served in Vietnam?**

1966, 1967. From about January '66 to February '67 I think it was.

You

17:00 **taught the South Vietnamese a lot about fighting, but what did they teach you, what did you take from them as a people and as fighters?**

Well as fighters I can't think of anything. They had this incredible ability to live off the land, grab a chicken from here or there or whatever. It was quite contrary to our views of soldiering.

17:30 If there was any observations out of Vietnam it was one of great tragedy, uprooting all of those youngsters but more so their families. Terrible toll. As I said I think it was a classic example of yet another occasion that it could have been resolved in different ways, if the

18:00 Indochina war had have been resolved separately. Or a classic occasion of even before we went in there to negotiate and resolve it. It is not unlike, I don't want to peddle my own wheelbarrow but it is not unlike Iraq. You know we have got the same sort of circumstances where people are driven more by emotions and personal view as opposed to the cold hard facts and reality.

18:30 And sadly that's war. Sadly you know, touch wood, we won't see any suffering from our people in Iraq but chances are we will. Chances are we will and I hope we don't. So the lesson of all of this is, and I continually say it when I make comments publicly and I am

19:00 reasonably well sought after as a speaker at different places, is the fact that war is the very last resort. It is something that we should never try and avoid at all costs, but it is certainly the last resort. And I don't think, there haven't been enough arguments for me to say we have tried everything in recent times.

When you left Vietnam

19:30 **at the end of your tour, did you leave feeling good about your work there? Did you feel satisfied on a personal level?**

No there was a degree of frustration. In fact when I came home most of the Team we were debriefed by the hierarchy, the hierarchy being senior headquarters and so forth and my comments were very blunt. "We're going to lose the war. "And I

20:00 saw that in the village that hadn't been patrolled, where the old man gave me curried chicken. I saw it in Binh Ba, no matter what we did it wasn't long before two warrant officers were killed and then the battle of Binh Ba. And I saw by reading the newspapers about some of the Vietnamese battalions that I was familiar with and fond of being decimated.

20:30 But above all it was there before I left and it was very frustrating and I have got to say, it wasn't long after I returned home before I lost my wife, and that probably started the marbles clicking. And 69 was such a bloody bad year I lost so many mates I lost

21:00 count, and virtually all of them were married and so I became Mr Fix It, wandering around talking to the widows and so forth. That in itself was a tragedy I hadn't even probed before, because as a soldier you write home, you tell someone that their husband did this or that and sometimes lie about it. But you never saw the

21:30 suffering or the agony of the widow with kids, terrible. And I was visibly moved by it. I remember one girl, I still communicate with her, she lost her husband over there on the Team, I went there for dinner one night, we were both single actually, I was a widow and she was a widow, there was nothing

22:00 in it, just companionship. And I was there for dinner and we were supporting each other and I will never forget it. She said, "I have just got this letter from the Prime Minister. I am excited about it but what does this mean?" And it was [the bravery award] Mentioned in Dispatches, posthumous obviously, and what it meant, he had been given this little oak leaf for his ribbon, that in some cases you are mentioned for a higher award and you don't get it, that's Mentioned in Dispatches.

22:30 So I explained it to her and she was happy, but I was shocked, furious angry, that the system hadn't had the guts, courage, leadership man management or sound administration, to go around and give her the letter and explain it for Christ's sake. Here she was a lonely grieving widow with a child of twelve months at that stage in a room in the

23:00 Gold Coast trying to find her way in life and no bastard would bother to tell her what it was about. And last year when I was down military college, if you're listening Johnny, the commandant was just telling me he had been to Bundaberg to present medals, she was remarried but did I know her? Her name was Betty Bodestal? Of course I knew her she was an old friend as he was. And I had seen her, she was

23:30 I had been communicating with her in those bad days. But why was she there? Because nobody had ever given her his medals. He was killed in 1967 – that's thirty-six years later. The government didn't decide to give them, somebody found out she didn't have them and went chasing them up., that's unforgivable.

24:00 Unforgivable. I have given you the good side of the army and so forth, but gee there is a rotten side too, be it to do with the government or the bureaucrats. That's part of it.

It sounds so cruel and ironic. You came back from Vietnam wanting to survive and then you lost your wife and all of these women who lost their husbands, was it also part of the healing

24:30 **process for you? You were helping them and they were helping you from losing your wife?**

No, I was communicating with them before my wife died. I saw it as a duty to my mates.

So it is an extension of the mateship?

I became the father confessor, one of them, name not mentioned obviously. We were having dinner one night and she was feeling guilty about it, she had started to have an affair

25:00 with a bloke and wanted to know what was my view, she wanted to go and live with him. You have got to understand we were talking about a time when we were, it was a different society. We weren't as liberal as we are now. And my comment to her was, "Well you have got to do what you have got to do. Billy won't object. He wants you to be happy. But you have

25:30 got to be careful, if you want to live with him why not marry him? He could just dump you?" And her answer was very simple. She said, "George you don't understand. If I marry him I am going to lose my war pension. And if this bloke dies at a later date I am going to have nothing." So we even had this in the system, that our widows that had lost their husbands, "There is your war widow

26:00 pension. Thank you very much, but by the way if you get married next week you are going to lose it all." And some of them did get married and lose their husbands and got nothing. I went on a crusade about that and got the ball rolling and then dropped out of it for a number of reasons because the ball was rolling. And it was the year before last they decided people who were widows and had got married

again, as a result of their husband being in action would keep their pension.

26:30 And when you talk about ironic when I lost my first wife all I wanted to do was go back to Vietnam. All I wanted to do was go back and take out my spite on somebody I understood I could take it out on. It was a selfish approach but I was immensely grieved I loved her so much. It was ironic in that about

27:00 twelve months after she had gone I went up to get paid and they said, “There is no pay for you, you owe twelve months’ back pay of marriage allowance.” Which when you’re married you have got an extra bit of pay to look after your family. And I said, “How come?” And they said, “The children aren’t living with you, you have got to be under the same roof.” And I said, “How the bloody hell can my children live with me in the army under the same roof, I have been in a tent ever since?” So I lost it and when I eventually married and found this beautiful second bride,

27:30 I appealed to the CO who knocked it back, then I appealed to Northern Command who knocked it back. Then I appealed to Sydney where the headquarters is, to redress a wrong, the very same principal that young soldier used with Westmoreland. And then Sydney knocked it back. And then I appealed in Canberra and they knocked it back. So then I sent it to the Army Board, the board of

28:00 generals, and they knocked it back. No one was sympathetic, “No, they’re the rules.” And I had one last appeal to the Governor General and I took it, I wrote to the Governor General and I was married about this stage and it was about two or three years after I started this appeal process, and we were getting ready to go back to Vietnam and I got a phone call from [Lionel] Murphy who was the [Federal] attorney general,

28:30 personal phone call. He said, “Look I apologise for this, they have done you such a grievous wrong, you can sue the pants off the army if you want to.” It was a phone call I wasn’t supposed to have gotten. And twenty-four hours later I got this letter in communiqué from the military board of generals it said, it didn’t say it had been before the

29:00 Governor General, “We have reconsidered and we are happy to give you back-pay if you promise you won’t take any legal action and whatever.” So I spoke to my bride Helen. And she said, “George darling, you have got to do what you have got to do but my advice, you have got a lot of time left in the army, so why rock the boat? If you can get that obstruction eliminated and corrected for future generations why bother?” So we got this nice big sum of money back, and a

29:30 nice letter from the general saying it had been rectified. Three months later, no the next year and we were getting ready to go to Vietnam I think and this bloke lost his wife in a tragic accident and he had two children. So I grabbed him and said, “Listen mate I have been through this, I can help you.” I said, “I am going to send you on compassionate leave, you’re going now

30:00 and if you need anything call out. And believe me they won’t touch your pay, that’s all been sorted out.” Well he finished his compassionate leave and he came back and said, “Sir you are wrong, I have just got a letter saying because the children aren’t living with you you have just forfeited your marriage allowance.” So I went up to the commanding officer, I was a major and the commanding officer was an old mate of mine, threw it on his desk and said, “Sir you have

30:30 got a choice, we can either fix that or I am walking out the gate. I am not going to have this.” He agreed with me and we both revolted actually, rebelled, and they fixed it, they finally fixed it. It took yet another incident before the system did it. Yet it is the same system that will tell you all about leadership and to know them and how to look after them.

I mean that’s right they want you to lay your life down for

31:00 **your country and they won’t look after your family.**

Anyway that’s my bitch for the day.

Well it is a pretty important one, how can men go and do a job if they don’t know their family is being looked after?

Well that’s right. The bottom line is that most people don’t know. When they go they just assume the same as I did when I was looking after all of these widows I assume. I got back to that, that is the most tragic thing. It is not only the

31:30 lives lost, it is the lives of all of them young women. They are still in their prime, young women with youngsters they were responsible for, well it doesn’t make it any easier they have still got that terrible loss. There is the consequence of war. I haven’t changed sides, I believe if this country is

32:00 under threat we have got to fight and we have got to die for it, if we have to. But by gee we don’t have to do it unless there is an urgent pressing need with no other choice, and I think politicians are taking too many options these days.

When you were going off to war did you ever think about if you didn’t come back, how that would impact on your family? Is that something

32:30 **that you can’t let yourself think about, had you put things in place, how would they cope?**

Well I think it is. In Korea it didn't worry me because I was still young and immortal. And I really had no responsibility other than an aging mother and brothers who could cope with it. It is interesting to say that because in Malaya for example when I was talking about that particular incident going into a camp, when I changed

33:00 magazines and I got behind a tree the thought struck me, "I can stay behind the tree, the boys are just up the road. I have done my bit, I stirred them up." And then I immediately thought of my beautiful bride and said, "No." I thought of her before I stepped out from behind the tree again. The thought was there, I don't want to sound corny about it, Judy was there as well. In Vietnam I thought of my family a

33:30 lot and thought about my wife a lot and I often wondered what would happen to them. But I was naïve, I thought the system would look after them anyway.

In Vietnam when you got R and R, what sort of things did you do to relax and blow off steam?

Well I didn't, I mean I went to Da Nang on Anzac Day flew there and blew off steam with the boys and had two up and got drunk.

34:00 And back on a plane, back to the unit. I went down to the 6 RAR just prior to Long Tan with a bloke by the name of Felix Consenkus, he is dead now, we went down there for about three days. That was it, at that stage when we went to Binh Ba everybody was getting so bloody tired I pulled the two warrant officers and myself out and on one of

34:30 our trips we went down to Vung Tau and if you excuse my language, got pissed. And they were single blokes so they started chasing sheilas, but I was married so I just kept getting drunk. That was twenty-four hours overnight. That was it, other than right at the

35:00 end of the tour of duty, I got whacked with a mine blast and I was in hospital and I walked out of the hospital down in Vung Tau and then joined 6 RAR on one of their operations. I was longing for Australian company. For twelve months I had been virtually with Vietnamese, it didn't matter where they were. I felt happy being with the battalion out on operation,

35:30 I felt comfortable I was with Australians. Of course why I was out there the CO found out I had walked out of the hospital and I got another rocket and was told to get my backside back to Vung Tau and get on a plane to Hong Kong for R and R, which I did. I went there for five days and then got back to Vung Tau and back out to Binh Ba and took a

36:00 patrol out and that was when we were shelled and then forty-eight hours later I was home watching football. So that was my rest, five days in Hong Kong, a trip to Da Nang for two up with the boys overnight, a trip to Vung Tau overnight. A trip to Nui Dat to see 6 RAR, which is about three days and I suppose

36:30 you could argue that I had a bit of rest and recreation out with 6 RAR on operation.

Was that enough to keep you fresh?

I was very tired towards the finish. I think if I had have stopped I would have gone into a deep sleep, relaxed and gone into a sleep and wouldn't have come out with it. I was living like a lot of others,

37:00 on the edge, but there wasn't enough time. Five days is not enough time to wind down, when I got home after about seven days, I mean the first seven days was just a terrible adjustment. I was a terrible husband, just wouldn't do what you're supposed to do, co-operation and so forth. I was still doing whatever, and then on top of that the army at

37:30 Canungra asked me to come back early, cancel my leave because they were short of instructors. So within a fortnight of being shelled I was back in Canungra instructing.

I bet that didn't go down well with the family?

Well they understood, my first wife, well they were both understanding. The army always came first really. That was my profession that was what was required.

38:00 I would catch up with the leave.

In hindsight do you think it is a bad idea to send men straight back to their families, forty-eight hours after?

Yeah it is. Absolutely it is madness. You will see it in the 'mad galahs'. The worst affected were the National Service blokes. They were magnificent soldiers, anyone who tells you we can't produce young soldiers in a short period of

38:30 time simply does not know the military. And there are generals that say that, well they don't understand leadership or their soldiers, these soldiers within twelve months of being conscripted were fighting battles winning and commanding. Absolutely brilliant and because they came from all walks of life they brought with them a sense of maturity to the army, a maturity that the regular army didn't have. It was a challenge to a lot of the young men in

39:00 the regular army. And it was a great changing pattern of the army and I am sure history will show that if anyone is smart enough to read into it. But as I said earlier I think, the bank clerk for example, he was on a plane and like me twenty-four hours later he was in an airport in Sydney, for example with someone saying, “There is your discharge papers, there is your pay, go home and get out of uniform.” The

39:30 following week he is back at work. He can’t connect or relate to his old football mates. His girlfriends are probably gone if he had a girlfriend at that age. Suddenly he is back in the same bank stamping things and yet a couple of weeks before that he was in Vietnam. And people say, “Why can’t he adjust?” Well how can he bloody adjust? I was able to adjust because I was back in the military family, I was back in Canungra, and even though every time

40:00 a machine gun went off I would be doing things instinctively, not breaking down and having convulsions but instinctively reacting. I was there and it was like a diver, you’re slowly coming up so you don’t get the bends [pain from sudden return to the surface], I was doing that; slowly absorbing it so that I didn’t have any of this trauma. The young national servicemen didn’t have any of that, straight from the bottom up to the top. He didn’t even

40:30 have his mates to go and talk to. He didn’t have a CSM, a CO, he didn’t have a badge, he had nothing. We just threw him back out there. Where some of them came back on the troop ship. And if you talk to a lot of them when you’re interviewing people you will probably find when they talk about coming back on the troop ship that was far better that whoof! [on a plane], even though it was only ten or twelve days, they had time to suddenly accept, relax and adjust, even that

41:00 was a short period of time. It was a stupid way. World War I, no one could even compare the combat our grandfathers or great grandfathers or fathers fought in, but equally they had a month or so coming back which helped, it had to help. Same as World War II, they were still in the islands waiting for six months sometimes before they came home. Vietnam no.

41:30 And it is inexcusable because our medical science at that time including psychology.

Tape 9

00:30 **So we might just move after your last tour of Vietnam, you moved to the jungle training centre at Canungra, preparing units for service?**

Yeah it was one of the most demanding postings I have ever had. I was there virtually seven days a week, seven nights a week and there was a sense of duty, you raised the question before about my family, but they understood it was an obligation and

01:00 it goes back to: I was very much aware that we had an immense responsibility to not only teach these youngsters to kill but to stay alive, to bring them back, and I was very much involved in that to the point where my experience over there with mines and booby traps, it was obvious that our soldiers weren’t getting enough training in that so wit, General Gray,

01:30 he was a colonel then, with his permission we introduced a mine booby trap course and that helped a lot.

What was that course?

Well it was a course where they go through as individuals and they set off traps and there is explosions all around them and then there would be a debrief as to why that mine, or why they were killed because they hit a trip wire or they were following a track or they lifted up a sack of rice without doing things. Pulling down a flagpole,

02:00 leaning on a tree, the obvious things which a lot of youngsters don’t even understand. So we did all of that and it was very demanding, and it was during that time that I lost my wife and I can always remember Canungra as a place where, that going up from the sandy bottom up to the top, there were other mates with me.

02:30 Jimmy Bourke had been shot through the mouth, he had lost half of his platoon, sniper they knocked them off one by one. Jimmy was having difficulty adjusting. David Rowe had lost a warrant officer and always blamed himself, he was having difficulties and there were others and we were like a magnet within this brotherhood, outside on the bar.

03:00 We were all married and of course I was still living in because my family was still living in in Brisbane, they had married quarters. And it wasn’t any disrespect for wives or lack of love for wives, we just wanted to cling to each other, and we would drink. We used to drink and go our separate ways and we became very close, we had been close before but it was our way of slowly releasing it. I can always remember that. And there is an amusing side to it, there was

03:30 one night we got some very bad news that we had lost something like about seven of our mates in

twenty-four hours over there. So I said, “Stuff this.” We weren’t allowed in the mess if we were in jungle greens and of course we were on the Battle Ridge so we were always in jungle greens. So I said, “Let’s go inside the mess.” It was a cold night., so we all went in, and Felix Consenkus, Military Cross winner, he was on the team, we were all ex-members of

04:00 the team all infantry., and so we started drinking whiskey and every time we had a drink we would throw it in the fire, smash the glass. I know that sounds childish but that was our way of releasing it. And we went through a lot of glasses. And the next day the PMT the president of the mess, grabbed me, “George” he said, “You and your mates last night this has got to stop,

04:30 you broke over eighty-five glasses I have just had a stocktake.” I said, “No problem sir we’ll pay for them, we were just letting off steam.” He understood that. And Felix Consenkus, in broken English Felix said, “Well as a matter of fact colonel it was not eighty-five we broke, at least hundred and fifty.” And the PMT said, “Right a hundred and fifty.” And the PMT walked away and I said, “Felix for Christ’s sake!” So

05:00 we paid for a hundred and fifty, and it was only eight-five. But that was the emotion that ebbed and flowed. The most important thing was trying to provide advice to all of these youngsters who were going, be they the officer level and so forth. And I think that was sad because you knew them all, because you were exposed to them and every time you heard about another

05:30 mine incident you would wonder whether you had done, there was as much trauma coming out of there as really was in Vietnam in some ways. And I can remember this big fellow by the name of Patterson, big fellow, lieutenant, he was a National Serviceman, he was getting out. And I knew he didn’t want to get out, he was about to get married and he didn’t want to go. And I said, “Do you really want to go?” and he said, “Not really. But they can’t find me boots big enough.” He was always putting little boots on and he was in agony, couldn’t walk.

06:00 And I said, “Mate if you want to stay in I will get you the boots.” And he said, “Really?” And I said, “Yeah.” So I caused a stir in the system and got him the boots. He got his boots, went home and got married and stayed in. and he went over to Vietnam and got himself killed. Never saw his little daughter. All of those sorts of things. You had people like Tony

06:30 Pirello, always mischievous and so on, got killed. And people I have mentioned before and some of the wives who became widows I associated with. And years later you get emails form people like Peter Pirello saying, “I understand you knew my father?”

Does that spook you when that happens?

Oh yeah very much. In fact one that really spooked me was when I

07:00 was at the Infantry Centre and I was a major in charge of specialist week, training snipers and those sorts of people. And the commandant said, “George I have got to go, can you review the parade of young infantrymen graduating.” I said, “No problem.” So in my own style I said, “As you come up I want you to tell me what unit you’re going to and your name.” And they went through and this bloke said, “Wilson 2 RAR.” And I didn’t think about it.

07:30 Anyway we went up to the canteen later to have a drink with them and their parents and this bloke came up to me and I was with Helen, my second wife. And he said, “Sir I would like to introduce you to my mother, I think you know my mother.” And I said, “Do we?” And she said, “Yes I was Joe Wilson’s wife.” And then it dawned on me. Joe Wilson was a bloke in Malaya which we didn’t get around to talking about, Eagle Force which was a Special Forces operating on the border in 57.

08:00 And there was a break of about five days after patrols and I had gone home. He was a separate patrol and he came around to my place on the day we had to go back and had a cup of coffee with me and Maureen my first wife, and we got on the ferry and went back. And he got on a chopper and I got on a chopper and he went that way and I went that way and I no sooner landed in the chopper

08:30 thirty minute flight, got out to rejoin the patrol on the border, and they said, “The news has just come through. Joe Wilson has just been killed.” And there they were, very moving, grown up. And his mother had never married again.

It must have been hard because you would have so much knowledge to pass on, and did you have enough time to pass it on?

In what way?

09:00 **In the course**

At Canungra?

Yeah was it frustrating in that way, or did you feel you had enough time?

No it wasn’t frustrating, I found it satisfying because Gray was an outstanding leader, I was working with people I trusted and there was a sense of purpose. We were trying to protect our own. And then the great

09:30 rewards of that came years later when I was asked to start the Battle School at Tully. And I simply applied all of those rules that had been in place at Canungra but introduced all of the other beliefs that I had which turned out to be very successful. There is a plaque, a message that I left on the board down there that is now virtually permeated into virtually every unit and the overseas with the Marines the Yanks and everything else. It is my work and it goes along the lines of,

10:00 “When you join the army you took an oath to serve your country and that did not imply a contract for unions or relaxation or the pleasures of life. On the contrary, that oath meant you were going to face danger, hardship, risk of life, loss of comrades, discomfort and exhaustion and so forth. The Battle School is here to remind you of that oath.”

10:30 Yeah. Goes down well but it sums it all up.

So how did the Battle School come to be?

Well because,

When did it start up, what year?

1979. I was a lieutenant colonel at that stage, it came to be because the Chief of Army and Ron Gray who is now a two star general, I was a lieutenant colonel at that stage. It came to be because the Chief of Army and Ron Gray got together and were very worried about how the army was going. It was post Vietnam,

11:00 there were too many lectures, too many slides, too much technology, too much eating and too much worrying about sprained ankles and so forth and the breast feeders and so forth. So they wanted an area where they could inject the old army.

So how did that new culture come in? How did that happen?

Well systemisation I guess the Vietnam War was over and somebody put their hand up and said, “We need to change it.”

11:30 And having we had the best army in the world then in 1974/75 without a doubt, our regiment was nine battalions strong and we could have taken on any bastard. It was a magnificent regiment. As was the army and it proved itself in combat in recent times in Borneo, in confrontation [with Indonesia] and Vietnam. I don’t know I saw it happening and a few of us were

12:00 protesting, but the disease just got more. I mean where you would have a book that big to tell you about your leadership, suddenly you had a wheelbarrow. Created a lot, hence I am digressing, in 1990 as I was leaving the army the army approached me and said, “Would you write a book on leadership?” and I said, “Yeah I will, providing it’s set by my rules, no graphs, no academics, it is written as I want it.”

12:30 And they agreed. It is in its fourth print and still being used, Leadership on the Battlefield. And that was my gift to the army, and it is very popular. But getting back to your question, Gray and the Chief of the Army, Donald Dunstan said, “We need to find a place and somebody.” So they touched the computer,

13:00 “Who is expendable?” and it spat out George Mansford. So I was given the job of setting it up and I did a bit of research. Obviously it had to be in north Queensland where there is rainforest, tropical and I looked and it had to be in my opinion where it rained and rained. And Tully was the ideal place because it was also a link the army had. And so we moved into Tully and we did it, and today even in my time you are getting American Special Forces and British Special Forces and

13:30 other Special Forces from overseas, all sorts of people coming there as well as our own.

So talk about what you saw needed to be there for it to be a proper Battle School, what was the infrastructure of it?

Well the infrastructure was simple, it was cheap. And the Chief of Army had directed. There was no office as such, I had a blackboard, the training program was on the blackboard, if we

14:00 changed anything it was deleted. It was a place in isolation, it was like a monastery. There was no leave outside of our area, it was austere, the best comfort you would have was a stretcher and a sleeping bag, including me. The students, because they were only there for three or four weeks and in the camp

14:30 only for one night, they slept on the cement under those holes where the rain came through. And there was a number of rules, everyone walked around with a loaded weapon with a round [bullet] up the chamber and if anyone had an unauthorised discharge they were fined a hundred dollars because I was getting back to Malaya where we lost three people in one day, all killed accidentally, our mates, killed by three of their mates, so there is six gone really.

15:00 And there was a dramatic decrease in the amount of UD [unauthorised discharge]. It is gone now because the army says, “That is not a legal order.” I wouldn’t last in your army of today, I wouldn’t last., we had no batman, no orderlies, no stewards, everyone got their own food. Everyone washed their own dixies, no plates, no sheets, none of those administrative things

15:30 that start to bog down. No married quarters, our wives and families, it was a tough decision for me, very much in love with my bride Helen, they lived in Townsville which was four hours' away and I would see them once a month for about four days. We did that for three years. Why did I do it? We were training for war

16:00 even though there wasn't a war around. That's what they wanted and that's what they got, training for war. I used every lesson that I had been exposed to, even including the enemy camp. I had a camp out there and I would run, the instructors would be exhausted and they would go through this foliage absolutely exhausted and as they came out there would be all of these figures around the fire and a couple over there and a couple over there, engage and they would have to start shooting them. And of course the

16:30 soldiers loved it because they knew it was a realistic example. Ambushes, the whole box and dice. Everything was based on fact, everything was from lessons from the past and everything was there to save soldiers and I would like to think that we have done just that in some of the campaigns we have fought since then. The SAS went through there. It was a pretty tough course, no holds barred and I gave examples of the discipline I meted out.

17:00 In fact well I can tell you now Johnny Howard just before I left they brought in a telephone box which I didn't know about, I had been away on a conference, and the beauty of not having a telephone box was that anybody and everybody had to go through the system if they had a problem, the students. So we discovered that some soldiers were broke and their wives weren't getting money or they were broke or somebody's wife was playing up with

17:30 Billy Brown or somebody's girlfriend was having two or three of them on at the same time. All of these problems that affect soldiers and we had the ability to start sorting them out because we knew. Because they didn't have any other means of communication. And then one day I got back and my brand new second in command said, "Look." And he was very proud of himself, there is the phone box. So that night at eleven o'clock I got my driver, I said to him, "Get your vehicle." He brought it down and I said, "Back it up against the phone box,

18:00 now push it over." And the phone box was pushed over and I said, "Now put the vehicle away and you know nothing."

I thought you were going to tell me you blew it up.

No I pushed it over, but it didn't come back in my time. And then my next driver, this was how the army was going, he turned around, he was going backwards and forwards to Townsville and I could never figure it out on a weekly basis. He was being counselled down there. Why was he being counselled? I discovered because he had written a letter to his girlfriend threatening to commit suicide if

18:30 she didn't go back to him. I knew this bloke he wasn't going to commit suicide, it was an act. So the next time he was supposed to go down I cancelled his visit and I took him out bush, I used to do that on occasion by myself, I took him with me, set up camp. I had a rifle and I gave him a rifle because you always carried a rifle out there in case of pigs or whatever. I said, "There is the rifle, I will be gone for three days. Now if you really want to commit suicide or kill yourself you have got seventy-two hours in which to do it." Big call, but I knew him.

19:00 I went away and I didn't hear any shots, when I came back he was still there and I said, "You didn't do it?" He said, "No Sir." So then I got about him, I said, "Don't you ever write letters to the system threatening this or that? The girl is not worth it. You're worth something and you have got to get on with your life." So I went back and they said, "He didn't turn up." And I said, "He doesn't have to." And I told them what happened, well the whole psychology corps they went to pieces. I was

19:30 going to get court-martialled and everything. But my mate down in Canberra sorted it out, the old general because I set the rules you see?

So when soldiers came to the Battle School was that a step up for them was that something different?

Yeah they loved it.

Did you see a change in them from beginning to end?

Oh absolutely. And I mean the change, it was a challenge, they wanted to be treated like soldiers,

20:00 they wanted to be able to prove that they could do this or that in a battle situation. It is always a question mark with soldiers and a lot of people don't get a grip of that importance. I did because I was one of them. They loved it. They even loved it more because on the final night I would open the canteen and let them drink, let them do whatever they wanted to do until twelve o'clock at night and then the shutters would come down and they would be drunk and if they had a fight they would have it and they would sort themselves out.

20:30 And the next day they would go home and they would be too tired to go to town in Townsville, to get into trouble. I had got all of their passion and enthusiasm so to speak out of the way, which I thought was very clever. I used to do it all of the time with different units. I am talking about leadership not

about George Mansford. Another time we were out, when we were getting ready to go to Vietnam I was a brand new company commander, there is the company, and we were out

21:00 in the scrub and we were getting trucks the next morning to go back to Townsville. And the CSM said, “Can I give them a can of beer?” And I said, “Give them what they want.” And he said, “Sir they’ll get drunk.,” I said, “Let them get drunk” and that night they got drunk, a lot of them were already Vietnam veterans and they had a ball, they reckoned I was the greatest thing out. “Old ‘Warrie’ George, he lets us get drunk, he can trust us.” Next morning I said, “Line them up on the road.” And the CSM said, “But sir, the trucks aren’t here.” It was a twelve-mile walk,

21:30 twenty-five K, or whatever. I said, “The trucks aren’t coming RSM, I have cancelled them.” And so they lined up and we marched with all of their heavy equipment on their backs with their hangovers and they were dry retching and they were vomiting. And we got back to camp and the next time we went out on exercises, “Give them what they want RSM.” They would have one beer and go to bed

22:00 because I was always one jump ahead of them. And I did the same at the Battle School, before they would leave they would expect to get praise for what they had done and they would all be there with all of their gear and I would say, “Standby for inspection,” and they would look at me with their mouths open and I would go by inspecting all of their basic pouches and I would say, “You have been here for three weeks and you have got an empty water bottle, for Christ’s sake. Do you want to do the course again?” “No sir.” “Well get the bloody thing filled up, you’re an infantryman!” “Yes sir!”

22:30 The messages stick.

What else can you tell me about the specific training at the Battle School?

Well I think I have covered in generally, we stayed there, we did everything you would do as if you were in war and we trained as we would do as if we were in war. And all I can I mean another example.

Did you do night training for example?

Oh absolutely of course yeah.

What would be a typical exercise of a night?

23:00 Well night patrols. Night ambushes, those sorts of things yeah we would do them. it was all about the stark reality. My son-in-law who was in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] was visiting a place in the Cape up near Northern Territory and he was driving a RAAF truck and he stopped for a night in a pub. And he is there in uniform and the bloke said, “Are you in the RAAF?” and he said, “Yeah.” “I used to be in the army.” This is the publican. And Barney said, “Oh you might know my father.” “Who is that?” He said, “George Mansford.” “That bastard?”

23:30 He said, “You see this?” And he has got this big jagged scar over his arm. “Your bloody father-in-law gave that to me.” And then he told them the story about how he was in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] had cut himself with a machete at the Battle School, we were flooded in, I walked in and this eighteen year old medic is dabbing the man with this red stuff, disinfectant. And I said, “What are you going to do?” and he said, “We will wait for the river to go down and send him to the hospital to get stiches.”

24:00 I said, “The river won’t be down for at least twenty-four hours and you wont be able to stitch it.” and he said, “Well in that case Sir I will bandage it up and they will do what they do.” I said, “No, you stitch it now.” And this young bloke looked at me and said, “But Sir I haven’t done any stitching.” “There is always a first time, you’re a medic, stitch him.” anyway he stitched him, did a terrible job

24:30 and hence there was this scar. But the interesting thing is, all of those incidents I tell you, the bloke the bar owner the publican, Barney didn’t buy a beer all night, the publican bought him beer all night. The bloke that I said, “I am not going to charge you, I am going to send you out for another course.” I get letters from him every year. Isn’t that interesting?

25:00 **It is, it sounds like you understand that ultimately men do like to be challenged and do want to be pushed and do appreciate discipline?**

Well I think it’s all done that’s achievable. There is no point setting targets that are unachievable because then it is a self destruct and a lot of people get carried away with that. But yeah it is really an exercise in common sense.

How long did the Battle School go for, and what changes took place?

25:30 What now?

During the time that you were there?

Well nothing changed while I was there.

But did your training methods evolve?

Well they evolved in that I introduced leadership courses, ambush courses, I just made it harder, made it tougher, depending on the standard of soldier and I go back to that point, every objective had to be achievable.

26:00 I looked at it from that light. And for the environment point of view I improved on that, which helped me later on because I was on the World Heritage board and the Rainforest Foundation and the tourist organization, North Queensland. So I am still pretty busy in that regard, I relate that to the changes in the Battle School with the environment. But the principles didn't change. Everyone walked in regardless of rank,

26:30 they did the twenty K march. Everyone had a weapon with a round up the spout. Everyone carried the same rations, the best you would get is a stretcher, and all of these basic rules of soldiering. And it was like a war zone and hence 'Warrie' George even put more emphasis on it.

27:00 **Can you tell me, I know you related that story off camera but talk about different ranks going through the Battle School?**

I mean I can tell you that different ranks went through the Battle School. One course General Gray insisted all of his generals and brigadiers and colonels went through, and what I didn't tell you before is one of them had a UD, an unauthorised discharge, and I insisted because the soldiers were watching

27:30 that this general be disciplined and so he was fronted and duly fined two hundred dollars and disciplined for having a UD, soldiers were happy, the law had been passed, in fact he had paid more than they would have. There was no rank, everyone carried through. But I have got to say that in recent times, I was invited back there not so long ago,

28:00 and there was a big iron mattress and white crispy sheets and the young officer looking after me for the night, my aid so to speak said, "Sir this is your bed." And I said, "I can't sleep here." He said, "Sir it is the best accommodation we can offer, otherwise we will have to put you in a hotel in Mission Beach?" I said, "No you're missing the point, it is not the accommodation, if I sleep in that I will be betraying every soldier I served with in my time. And if they hear about it I will never live it down. "And he said, "Well what will you do?"

28:30 I said, "I am going to sleep out there so I slept out in the grass. And it rained and I still slept out there in the grass, they thought I was absolutely stark raving mad. And they had stewards, white plates and married quarters at Mission Beach. It had all changed.

Does that disappoint you that it had changed?

Oh absolutely because it is only a matter of time now before the Battle School becomes another school.

29:00 They have been stupid enough not to understand its value.

And what about the training, is it still tough?

How can it be when you have got instructors that instead of staying there at night time and having a few beers, I am a family man you have got to understand that. I am the last person to say stay away from your family but how can they start exchanging ideas or developing camaraderie when they're running home to Mum or Mum is at the front gate

29:30 at four o'clock in the afternoon? How do the students react to that when they know they can't go home but the instructors are. And the CO whoever it is, be it me or whoever who is gone for three or four days. How can you? You can't do it. And you lose that uniqueness. I am disappointed. I suppose it was predictable. I knew it would happen sooner or later, and in fact to be perfectly honest and if you're listening General Cosgrove, if they take it any step further

30:00 I am going to go down there and grab my plaque that says, "When you joined up you took an oath…" I will take it off.

It sounds like you have sacrificed a lot for the army in terms of your family time, do you look back and think that it has all been worth it, or do have doubts about that?

I look back, and again I don't want to dwell on it but I look back in relation to my two beautiful wives.

30:30 Maybe there could have been more time with them. But they would say, "Bullshit, absolute nonsense, we wouldn't have been able to put up with you." They are probably arguing about who is going to get me now, not either won't want me, because they have compared notes. There are regrets in that regard but I think that's natural when you have been so deeply in love. As I

31:00 said before there are regrets but I would not change a day. Because if I had have done that I would have been not as dedicated as I wanted to be. I wouldn't have been able to make decisions that I did make, that I wanted to make. I wouldn't have been able to lead by example if I was doing something else. I don't regret it, and I am sure both of them understood and still understand it. Just a bastard at heart.

31:30 **How long were you at the Battle School?**

Three years.

So by the time you got it up and running, it wasn't just you there obviously doing the training, how many people were there?

Well we were economical people just simply didn't understand the economy of it. I had twelve part time instructors, part time in that they weren't

32:00 part of the unit strength. They were instructors that came from different units on three month attachment. They came to me for three months but it was so successful that most of my instructors were fighting to come back. To volunteer for another three months and it wasn't because they wanted to get away from their wives, they saw a sense of purpose. The frustrations were over, all of the bullshit was behind, there was none at the

32:30 Battle School. And with all due respect they knew I would back them unless they did something stupid. There is another one of the battle cries, I always say to people make as many mistakes as you like but just make sure you don't make the same one twice. Unless of course it was a very stupid one that cost lives. That wasn't acceptable.

So what did you do after your three years at the Battle School, what did you do next?

I went to 11th Field Force Group as the assistant commander,

33:00 and then I was promoted to colonel to take over 11 /4th Field Force Group. And then I said, "This is not good enough, this should be a brigade," and so then I harangued people like [Kim] Beazley and generals down in Canberra and said, "I want to create a recon surveillance force in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands and the Gulf."

Can you talk about that?

Well we need surveillance forces that are

33:30 capable of operating in those areas in peace and in war. In peace it is to identify the drug smugglers and identify illegal boats, fishing and entry, and in war if we ever did get invaded, they are to stay behind and fight the enemy while we're there.

Was there any specific event that made you bring that up, and fight for it?

Well it was pretty obvious to me

34:00 that we are talking about some of the most vulnerable country in the world, we are a stone's throw from New Guinea which is a stepping stone.

So is it something you always thought should have been there, and you were just now in a position to bring it up?

I always knew it was vulnerable but it came closer to me when I was suddenly commanding 11 Field Force group which was undermanned, under strength, and no sense of purpose, and it just stood out. So the generals in Canberra at that time, Donald Dunstan had gone, so had Gray, they were saying, "It's all too hard, you can't do it."

34:30 "Why can't I do it?" "Well because the Aborigines are up there and Torres Strait Islanders, they're scattered and they will probably need to have a bit more training." So I then harangued and in the meantime I got my World War I colour patches back and all of my units were wearing them, a matter of pride, history, got

35:00 rocketed [criticised] for that. But if you notice in the army today they're all wearing them, so I won the point. I took Beazley and the chief of army who was Grayson at that time, and as we were flying around they were impressed with the concept and we were about to land in Weipa and General Grayson said, "George I think we will put this to SITSAC." SITSAC is an army committee that meets and I knew what SITSAC meant; that meant he would put it through and six years later regurgitate

35:30 it out the other end with a "No." Beazley was quite interested in it. I said, "Well General, I am delighted you're happy about it because when you get off the aircraft you're about to meet the company." He said, "Company?" And I said, "They are waiting for you, sir." And he said, "You haven't been given the nod." And I said, " I have already formed them." And the company was there, all civilians, part-time soldiers these blokes in Weipa, the miners, the forest men, cattle

36:00 men, all lined up, half of them in civvies and half in uniform and some of them without hats and it was au fait accompli. Beazley said, "This is great.," And Grayson said, "Well you have jumped the gun." I said, "I had to." So he started looking for flaws. "Where are you going to train them?" "I have organised with the local milk bar, we're going to take it over every Tuesday night and on Sundays when it is not open. We're going to train them there." That was the beginning, you go to

36:30 Weipa now and they have got a huge depot which is very functional. You go to Torres Strait, you have got boats, a headquarters there, barracks, you have got units on every island. They're all trained, be they black, white, brown or brindle. I went around to every Aboriginal and Torres Strait leader going back to my own experiences as a kid, and went for the heart of it, the people that make decisions.

37:00 And I did it to great success, to the point when a fellow by the name of Sebasio died up there in the Torres Strait, he was one of the leading lights of the Torres Strait Island community. And I went up there to pay my respects at his funeral and there was several politicians there and the new leader asked me to come out and do the eulogy, not the politicians or

37:30 ministers some of them, he asked me. My aide said to me at the time, “Gee, you upset them.” Catter [Bob Catter, Federal politician] was there, He said, “Catter was saying when am I going to make a speech?” They said, “You’re not, there is only one bloke George Mansford.” So yeah we did that, we re-raised the 51st, we re-raised the 31st Battalion, we set up a sig [signals] squadron, we set up the engineers and we became a brigade.

Obviously it grew to a huge thing but it started out very humble beginnings

38:00 **training them in the milk bar once a week, how did you go about getting it up and running, what were some of your initial obstacles?**

Well the obstacles were Canberra. And it was short circuiting. Beazley was a very good friend and he was Minister for the Army, I didn’t use him, I knew he would support me, but I didn’t use him that often.

38:30 But I certainly made the point whenever he was there, in fact the point when even Prime Minister Bob Hawke came and got briefed on it all, and he was very impressed. So you know we had the politicians on side in the government at the time and we just went from strength to strength to the point were I was deploying troops from Rockhampton on the weekends to Torres Strait, to link up with the 51st.

39:00 I deployed the whole brigade up there which was a big Australian exercise; and the SAS could get near their objectives. Two warships came in and tried to destroy the harbour and were destroyed by my artillery, that I was not supposed to have. Yeah we went from strength to strength. It was simply a matter also of the psychology of

39:30 letting them think it was their idea in the beginning. It was like the Battle School, nobody wanted anything to do with it because it was doomed to fail. The Battle School was one of them, our lines of communication were long, whenever we had a beer, which was rare, we would have to put it in the creek. And when we first started we had no power, it was candles and hurricane lamps. Now it has got power and everything, fridges [refrigerators] and so forth. But it was a matter

40:00 as it gathered momentum and became successful, you would be amazed at how many people now claim that they were responsible for setting up the Battle School. And that George Mansford helped them. And you would be amazed at how many people are claiming responsibility for the surveillance unit or the re-raising of the 11th brigade. Yeah George Mansford was the commander

40:30 but I gave him the nod or I gave him the ideas, or I gave him a lot of support. People – you don’t even realise how many there were. And you would be amazed how many platoon sergeants I had in the army that reckoned they were my platoon sergeant when I was a young platoon commander, there would be about three hundred of them. “Yeah I used to be his platoon sergeant” “Did you really?” “Oh yeah, he was a bit of a rebel that little bastard. I had to look after him.”

Tape 10

00:30 **Could you tell us a bit about ‘Eagle Force’ and the purpose behind it and how that was different to your first**

01:00 **deployment in Malaya?**

It was towards the end of our operational period in Malaya in 1957. We had shifted operations from first of all Kedah and then we moved to Perak and shifted the operation up to the Thai border where Chin Peng [communist leader] was operating – you know the leader of the terrorists. They had basically moved up there to avoid contact.

01:30 Anyway there came a time when we got the word that they needed six volunteers from each company for a special operation and I was volunteered, there were no volunteers, “You, you, you and you.” Anyway we ended up on the border, supposedly under the pre-text it was a training school.

02:00 And there was six of us from each [company] A B C D and four rifle companies, so there was about twenty-four of us. And we were briefed that one of the enemy had surrendered and he knew where Chin Peng was and the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] had already

02:30 put it on radio in Malaya and elsewhere, that this bloke had been killed to allay any fears of his mates that he surrendered. They thought he had been killed by security forces. And in the debrief to intelligence he told them about this camp, right in the middle, with a number of camps around the outside. And then again more outposts around that, so it became virtually impenetrable with all of the security.

03:00 And what they decided was that this captured man was going to lead a patrol back in to where the camp was. The patrol would then set up the flares with the RAAF and there was a survey team already in location on Bukit Timah, whatever it was, one of the mountains. On

03:30 the given time they would zoom in and grid it [mark out the target] and at the time the flares were set for eight o'clock in the morning. The smoke would go up and the bombers would come and in they would go. And the other four patrols of Eagle Force would then swoop as the helicopters were coming down. As well as throwing

04:00 the ropes out and coming down, rappelling down was hand over hand in those days, pretty hairy stuff. We trained for that, but in addition we also trained for the other job in case there was a need, by moving through the jungle at night time and positioning flares. We became very skilled at it, we were there for about four weeks patrolling and doing this, and then A company patrol

04:30 went out with the captured enemy man, we were on standby. They came back, they were unsuccessful. They knew [Chin Peng's group] they were around, they had found a couple of abandoned camps. But he [the guide] had been disoriented, he wasn't quite sure, so they said "We will send out another patrol with him, we will continue." And then they changed their minds, typical army fashion, I don't

05:00 know where that decision came from. And so that was the time that Joe Wilson and I were down there for a four day break, and we came back. He went to join his company and I went to join my mob, and the choppers [helicopters] went different, and his company that had deployed was no longer the small force,

05:30 it was just a conventional operation. They had deployed and forward elements had gone down and found the camp. And in the process they were detected by the sentry. The sentry was killed when they threw a grenade, killing him and a couple of others I guess. And then the company went into attack. And old

06:00 Charlie the CT said, they had laid an ambush and the first three Australians were killed and the enemy broke contact leaving their dead, and took off. And Joe went out on a patrol following up and was killed. That was Eagle Force, it was basically to locate this camp and then bomb the hell out of it with this other force coming in by ropes

06:30 to pick up the pieces. It had been done once before in the early days of Malaya. But the point is that they worked on an enemy informant who said the camp was there and aerial photography had found where they thought the camp was. The bombers went over in waves, and they were lucky they got the lot of them. So they thought this is a great way to

07:00 kill them. It didn't work.

You were opposed to the tactics of air strikes is that right?

No. I am saying in Kedah when we first went in we were preceded by air strikes and artillery barrages which I think was a good PR arrangement to say, "The Australians are here!" and what they did do was they left a lot of dead falls over the track, and you had to move them around.

07:30 Slowed us up. I wasn't over rapt [enthusiastic about] in the strikes, they were random, but this particular one if it had have come off would have been quite brilliant. Because there was a certain area, they knew where as most of the bombing in Malaya was random, keep them on the run, annoy them, frighten them. Same as artillery. We came as close to our own artillery as the

08:00 communist terrorists did.

And you mentioned there was quite a few people killed in accidents? Bullets loaded?

Yeah absolutely. We got back to training at Canungra which we talked of earlier, I mean we were taught all of these tactics and everything else and how to live in the jungle and so forth, but in doing that there wasn't so much emphasis as there could have been on weapon handling.

08:30 So when we went into operations, about the same time as we found that first enemy camp I told you about, we were coming back off patrol with a very inexperienced patrol commander and he, instead of coming back on the route that was briefed on and the time, he took a shortcut and came in from a different direction at a different time. Sentries weren't aware that

09:00 we had a patrol coming in that way and that time and opened fire. And of course we thought we had run into the enemy and we returned fire. Of course I was the 'rear end Charlie' so I didn't do anything, I was just watching the rear of the patrol. It was certainly whistling around. When we realised it was friend against friend, nobody was hurt, thankfully. A lot of ammunition was expended which went to show how accurate our firing was.

09:30 Well their firing, I didn't fire. Anyway we got back to the company base the next day after that operation was over, because we had to go back into that first camp. We found there a huge one thousand pound bomb in the middle of it, obviously the enemy were about to defuse it and make a bomb out of it wherever they could use it. While I was getting ready to go out with this demolition squad to blow up this bomb,

10:00 someone threw their Owen gun on a mattress on a piece of wire in this rubber tapper's house. And we had the char wallah with us, the char wallah being the bloke that provided all of the bugs and soft drinks, he was like a Salvation Army, he used to hang around the camp except he got paid for it. Anyway

this Owen gun went off [fired]and it has got twenty-eight

10:30 rounds in it and you could see the bullets hitting the char wallah's bottle and smashing. Nobody was hurt. Anyway when that was over – that was two incidents in two days – and the company commander came out and gave everyone a roasting and went back and sat in his chair. His orderly was cleaning his rifle and as the OC leaned forward to grab hold of a map the batman [orderly] put a round through the chair. I said jokingly, "If they keep this up we will be able to shoot anyone that touches a rifle in self defence."

11:00 Because it was very bad. Later on we went to Penang burying one of our mates had been killed accidentally and while we were going through the ritual the RSM raced up and said, "Make it two. Somebody else has just been killed. Sergeant in an ambush accidentally killed." And while we were rehearsing the final time the next morning, it was three, we buried three of our mates in the one day, all accidentally killed.

11:30 I said earlier, when you lose three people you have also got the three that pulled the trigger and so you can write off six. Not good.

Can you write them off as soldiers for good?

Well I don't know about that. I would think so, I mean that's going to play on them, I would think so. So that was the first tour I think we

12:00 lost about twenty-three all up. And some of them were accidental.

It seems to be far more common in late twentieth century wars or post World War I1 wars, the percentage of deaths from accidents and friendly fire?

Are you working on statistics or assumption?

Pure assumption.

Yeah it is I can tell you now, I would

12:30 think that that World War I and World War II were very high in accidental deaths. Even in Vietnam we suffered a lot of accidental deaths. UDs that were put down as battle casualties. Well they are too, I might add. Somebody pressed a trigger. In fact I know of a couple of my very close

13:00 friends that were killed by their own troops accidentally. One of the SAS blokes was killed accidentally. One of the three that was killed, he was killed accidentally. If you argue that one that's thirty-three and a third per cent. Jack Kirby, an old friend of mine, was killed by friendly artillery fire. They're the only ones I know of and I can think of others too. I am sure there would have been the odd one in Long Tan, it is

13:30 par for the course certainly in World War II. I have got no doubt whatsoever that there would have been a high number of friendly casualties.

It seems like such a dishonourable or unhonourable way to die?

Oh absolutely. But more so if you're just playing with the weapons and it goes off, as opposed to you see a fleeting figure over there and he doesn't answer your challenge.

14:00 That won't help the bloke that pulled the trigger, but it become more understandable. Waste of life and that's why I did it. They don't do it any more. Apparently it is against all of the military laws of the day.

You talked about having set up the Northern Surveillance unit and brought together 11th Brigade, how did your time with the regular army finish off?

How do you mean how did my time finish off?

Was that your last posting?

When I went to 11th Field Force Group, I was deputy commander as a

15:00 regular. When that finished I got out and took over command as a reservist and I did six years as a reservist and raised 11th Field Force Group to brigade level. We were living here at the time. I devoted as much time down there as I did in the regular. I was the cheapest thing they ever had, I was down there all of the time.

And did that take you right through to 1990 when you retired?

15:30 Took me to 1990 yes. I retired December '90.

Can you tell me about the decision to retire?

I had had enough. It is no secret now [Kim] Beazley, who was Defence Minister, came up and wanted me to take a job in Sydney commanding 2U as a two-star as opposed what I was then a one-star and I declined it. I had had enough. And it goes

16:00 back to the question that was when I decided, and it is a decision I never ever regretted, it was time for me to spend more time with my wife. So I declined it. It was time to go.

Can I ask you a philosophical question, each of the major conflicts you were involved in Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, there was never any real result, there was no

16:30 **victory no VE Day, VJ [Victory over Japan] Day, celebration by the community. Were you ever left wondering about the point of it, or the futility?**

Yeah well it certainly does come up from time to time. It is true to say in Korea,

17:00 though South Korea has become a very successful independent democracy. Whether it stays that way is another question. Certainly an economic power base. So there is certainly some justification for that keeping the hordes back out where they were before it all started, keeping in mind that the Chinese and North Koreans got down as far as Pusan at one stage. And

17:30 nearly over run that. So there is that angle. Malaya we certainly won there, there is no question about it, we beat them fair and square. But when you look at Malaysia now, with its fundamentalism and Islam and the Prime Minister until recently very hostile towards Australia, and you realise that the twenty-three Australians I spoke of from our battalion are buried there,

18:00 including some of the boys from the 'mad galahs' and their graves are very much neglected. And you wonder about all of that too. What it was all about. Vietnam? I suppose the justification, in my view it gave the message to Russia and China that they weren't going to just sweep through the place and one might argue that that was the stalling phase;

18:30 and you know they came to their senses, which is a pretty weak argument. Where I come from with Vietnam and I make it quite clear, Australians didn't lose the war, we won ours, we won Phuoc Tuy. There was no question we had Phuoc Tuy in our hands. And when we left the country it was still in our hands.

19:00 It wasn't until years later that North Vietnam swept down in breach of and violated the ceasefire and all of the rest of it. That's where we lost the war, they simply came through with surprising speed and so forth and the Americans just weren't game enough to go back in. That's where the war was lost not

19:30 in the conduct of it. Certainly we didn't. That's the justification for that. but philosophically when I look at all three I can look at people like Johnny Russell who would have been probably a great grandfather now or a grandfather, I look at all of those other mates around that time, Snowy Gordon

20:00 and so forth. And then you go through the others as well, Joe Wilson and so forth. I mean it's long winded and it is probably not an accurate description, but it is suffice for me to say I have got no hang ups about it. I am not bitter about it. If there is any bitterness I have about my campaign it is the betrayal back home.

20:30 And I will say that categorically any time to anyone anywhere and I get very angry now that I see some of the bastards coming out of the woodwork who were very vocal in their protests who are now being treated like heroes. Even those who avoided National Service. The stark reality is that no National Servicemen had to go to Vietnam. And all they were doing, they weren't protesting against Vietnam, they were just

21:00 demonstrating that they weren't prepared to serve their country. Having said that, the National Service of the day was stupid, the selectivity of it was stupid. And history will show that it was probably the demise of national service because you mention it now and people always react and think of Vietnam. They don't think of the national service of three months before which done such great wonders for our youth.

21:30 I get on with life, which is probably why I am now chairing this North Queensland Tourist Board, the Australian Rainforest Board, running the local fire brigade, chairing the local ratepayers association. I want to keep busy but equally I want to be productive. I keep saying to my doctor, "When the time comes for me to go, I am not going to sit in a chair and dribble,

22:00 I am going to go up the back with a bottle of whisky and a box of cigars and a bloody sheila and I won't come back."

When you signed up to go to Korea on the back of World War II, your father and all of the other men that went off to fight came back heroes

22:30 **there was no doubt, black and white they came back heroes, the entire community had been involved in the struggle. Each of your three conflicts have been on the perimeters, haven't been recognised by the community, how do you feel about that, about never receiving that same recognition?**

I didn't want that same recognition. I think that the World War I and

23:00 World War II blokes stand on their own. I was a regular soldier, I don't want that recognition, I have no

regrets about what I did and how I did it. The other side of the coin is we did what we did and I don't have a problem with any of that, I really don't.

23:30 Was that your question? There was something else I was going to add but it slipped my mind. Something about family or whatever I can't recall. I mean if, as I said, if there is any regret it is the futility of it all but the same is applicable also more so to World War I and World War II. The same is applicable to Timor and things like that, you mark my words,

24:00 Timor was political for us. It had nothing to do with helping the Timorese and I argued it then and I will argue it now. We were stupid, we didn't understand that Asian attitude of the Indonesians and they won't forgive us for a long time, I wouldn't think. But Timor has got all the penitential to become a nutcase on our periphery.

24:30 It won't go away we will end up having to support them.

Will Australians have to fight on their own soil do you think?

No, well let me rephrase that I mean, terrorism depends on what we define as fight. I think we are going to be a target for terrorism and so in that respect fight for it. I simply can't see at this stage an invasion. We probably wont need one because we have got the potential for the most

25:00 subtle invasion in history and that is the boat people [refugees]. They won't need to come here with guns and invade, boat people will be one of our biggest problems regarding social and so forth. And I am not drawing lines and that we shouldn't accept them. I am just saying we should have a plan saying, "This is how we can absorb, or we can't." And if you go down to Canberra now and say, "Where is the plan?"

25:30 I reckon the plan is that they are going to annex a couple of islands and put them there. And stew on it because politicians can't think past their own time of office and the time before the next election. There is the great danger, and if I had any reservations or any doubts it wouldn't be because we didn't win those wars or didn't come home heroes, and I might add now

26:00 the point is maybe it's the conscience of the people now coming out about Vietnam, why we are so keen about giving the right PR [public relations] to Timor and Iraq, and so alert to all of those soldiers because it is the conscience telling us what we didn't do for the Vietnam mob. And maybe it is the conscience of the government trying to find new medals and excuses to give us.

26:30 That's how cynical I am and I think it's true, I think there is a public conscience out there. It is now trying to wash their hands and cleanse their souls. I got away from the question.

We have an answer in there. Let me take each of your three conflicts separately, in what way did Korea change George Mansford?

27:00 Well I think it is fair to say I was at an age where I was young, naïve, and very poorly educated in the sense orf worldliness. So I suppose it helped me mature a lot quicker. Although I obviously still needed more maturity by the time I got home. I was only twenty. It helped me mature more, appreciate just how wonderful our country was.

27:30 And if there was ever a time for me to understand pride of our nation and the flag and everything it stood for, it was there, that was very important to me. It came to me, the values at home, and that you could never take anything for granted. And of course comradeship. It was really re-enforced. In Malaya

28:00 it was simply an addition of all of those things. But you could throw in the military skills that were now being applied and used. Where you had the jungle and so forth. Vietnam, well I think that was as an officer it gave me those lessons in added responsibility as a commissioned officer and not simply as a soldier or an NCO

28:30 as I had been in Malaya. I mean Malaya I could still see, when you talked of officers, a young platoon commander there who was dying and in a lot of pain he knew he was going, simply saying to me, "How are the boys, George?" and when I briefed him that everything was okay he said, "Take command." There is a professional. I learnt from everyone and the one I learnt

29:00 from him was take command. And I learnt from Ogleby that you follow officers because that's your job. I learnt from Saunders that there is other ways to skin a cat [more than one way to do a thing] than punish a bloke. I learnt from Charlie Anderson who you will read in the book as Jacko, that he too was talking about taking command and he too accepted responsibilities beyond his rank, and he too was prepared to fight for them.

29:30 With the hierarchy. So I learnt from those sorts of people and it made my life. Again it is inescapable. That's the male component and then again I can show that I am not really a chauvinist I also learnt from two beautiful women my wives.

What did they teach you?

Maturity and responsibility, love. All of those things are very important. And they set the example around the home,

30:00 they were leaders in themselves.

What was the most important lesson you got from your wartime service in terms of your civilian life? That would be most valuable in civilian life?

The most important thing I got out of the army that I can apply in civilian life is knowing your people. Understanding your people and considering your people and utilising your people to the best advantage.

30:30 That everyone is equal. There has to be a leader but that doesn't mean that you're Jesus Christ, it doesn't mean that you have got all of the ideas. If you have got ten people in the room and you're the leader, that means you have got nine brains operating against yours. If you are going to do it that way you're going to lose every time. So I think, you asked for a simple answer and there it is; it is knowing people, understanding people, valuing people, appreciating people,

31:00 can't go wrong. I haven't. Well you know there are probably some people around who would say I am a dickhead [fool]. But I think it's setting the standards. I often say anyone can wear a uniform, anyone can be a womaniser, anyone can be a drunk, anyone can be a liar, anyone can be a thief, but not anyone can be a disciplined individual who sets the standards. And that other people want to emulate.

31:30 Not bad stuff, eh?

What advice would you give to a grandchild who came to you and wanted to join the services today? To the army today?

Let me put it this way, it is not just services, whatever I would say to a grandchild whatever he or she was going to do, I would say, "Be yourself.…

32:00 Just obey without being over religious obey the ten commandments." I know that sounds strange coming from me when you think about 'Thou shalt not kill' and all of the rest of the stuff. It's about respect of values, it is about ethics, and pride and confidence, enjoy life, grab it, seize the day, grab a hold of it and don't let go, struggle until that last sunset. Never betray yourself, never betray

32:30 yourself. They are the sort of things I would say and they're applicable whether you're in the military or in civilian street.

That is fascinating because that runs against most people's idea of being in the military, being in the army, how do you be yourself? In being in the army and being a good soldier?

Well you can be a good soldier and be yourself. Soldiers are some of the

33:00 most Christian in the world if you talk about Christianity.

What about being yourself though, being your own man, being who you really are?

Well why can't you be?

I guess people associate discipline and having to follow the rules with giving up yourself?

But you have got discipline in your medical profession, you have got discipline as a surveyor, discipline engineering, it is a question of you interpret it. The discipline in the military is much harsher, but it doesn't make you a robot. The military in Australia and certainly

33:30 the army I served under can't be compared to a band of idiots who run around under Saddam Hussein with bands around their heads chanting and goose stepping and beating their breasts. It doesn't associate with the Japanese kamikaze or the Imperial Army. It doesn't the doped up Chinese we assaulted in Korea. Any of them.

34:00 Even the God damned Yanks, it doesn't associate with any of them because Australians are unique, Australians are different. It is the way we have been trained and the way we developed, and unless we understand and maintain that we're going to lose it. We will become robots, we will become gum chewers, we will even be calling fellows 'guys' instead of 'blokes'.

Is that what you guys were fighting for, for Australia is that what Australia is?

34:30 Well of course I was fighting for Australia, we were all fighting for Australia.

That is that one of the key thing, that individualism the freedom?

Well that is part of it. It is part of our lifestyle, our life. The ability to be able to go down and perve [ogle] on a girl on the beach in a bikini, the ability to be able to go and have a meat pie. The opportunity to tell your kids if you want to have a Christmas you have one and Christmas carols without being told what you can sing on Christmas Day or what you can't sing.

35:00 It is the ability to go to church or not go to church. It is the ability to vote or tell a politician he is a poofter [homosexual] or a dunce without being arrested or shot. Its all of those things. And it is like in the desert when you haven't got the water and it suddenly becomes the most important thing in your life to get a drink of water, because up until then you have taken it for granted because you can always go and turn a tap on, it has always been there and suddenly it had become something you didn't

appreciate.

35:30 And this is Australia, that we don't really appreciate. Everything we do. And to appreciate it, we have got to be prepared to fight for it. We have got to be prepared to defend it without being morons. And more importantly we have got to maintain it and that's not just the military that's the civilian community to maintain the standards. Whenever we talk about promiscuity we are attacking the very standards

36:00 that our grandparents had. Whenever we talk about changing the education system, we're doing something without understanding what it is we're changing. You know it attacks the whole social fabric of our society.

That social fabric also includes what seems central to your life and philosophy, mateship, is that

36:30 **modern life threatening that?**

Threaten what?

Mateship.

Well I guess it depends on what you interpret as modern life.

For you, is that under threat today in the military?

No, certainly not in the military. I don't think it is out there, either. I mean you have still got mateship, on the football fields and so forth. In fact one could argue that they are prostituting mateship with all of this

37:00 stuff I hear about gang rapes and all of the rest of it. I mean I don't know, I can't understand what's going on in that department. It is not a question of the army has done, is doing or will do. It is a question of what society is doing. And it's a question of how we value it. I don't want to preach on this, I am not a preacher, but the inescapable fact is that we have different values.

37:30 I know the names of my next door neighbours on both sides. I know the people on the other side of the street. I ensure that we all get together a couple of times a year for a social function. I know that if there is anyone in trouble around here I will go and support them and they will support me. Now in your street how many people know everyone in the street?

Very few.

And how many care if they know everyone in the street?

38:00 Very few, and that's not a criticism of those people, it is an example of how society is changing. It is like when my mother used to go and meet those 'New Australians' [immigrants]. New Australians – what a filthy word; that's not politically correct. Well what the bloody hell were they if they weren't new to this country? Where do they meet now? They don't. We shove them in a bloody camp,

38:30 a detention camp and I am not saying that's wrong or right, I am simply saying when they leave there as they do now, where do they go? They go to places where they are going to find people who sympathise with them protect and look after them. And in the main that is not our broad-based community. So how the bloody hell can we expect those people to assimilate if we're not going to get them involved? How difficult is it for some moron in Canberra to understand that?.

39:00 **I have got another barbed question for you.**

Try me.

Is a war, is a conflict necessary to keep that mateship and that sense of country and that appreciation for what we have alive?

No. It is simply a question of what you replace it with and you can do that in the schools.

39:30 You can do that within the youth. You can do it in many ways.

What should we replace it with?

Replace wars with? With what we should be doing, national pride and confidence, teaching our youngsters to stand up for themselves and respect others. Do all of these beautiful things, the qualities of life, to have respect for their wives or loved ones, whatever it might be. They are the things

40:00 we should be concentrating on. If you do that your quality of life improves and war is of no significance. Instead, we grabbed hold of Anzac and World War I because we had nothing else to grab a hold of but I would argue and I have argued it time and time again, who created the ANZACs? There is a generation there that have never been recognised that have never been recognised for creating that Anzac spirit. Not the blokes who fought there but their mothers

40:30 and fathers and the pioneers. And where are they in the history books today? They are the evil ones who

killed the blacks, they are the ones who stole all of the black children. So it is all distorted, I know that is part of our history but it has become so emotive and orchestrated that at times we don't really understand the truth of what was there,

41:00 and in those days, to say gee people were callous in those days. Of course they were callous when a mother has twelve children and loses five of them to polio, diphtheria or whatever and a couple to chicken pox, life is much cheaper.

George, just finally, why was it important for you to speak to us today?

What do you mean? You wanted to speak to me.

Well you didn't have to. Why are you speaking to me?

41:30 Lets make this clear. I didn't volunteer.

Is it important that stories are recorded?

Oh it is.

Why?

Well for future generations to understand exactly the views of the past. That's why I have been telling you my views. But you blokes rang me and I said, "Yeah, look, I would be happy to." If you had have rang to say, "We're not going to interview you," I would say, "That's fine." I wouldn't lose any sleep.

INTERVIEW ENDS