

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Christopher Dawson (Smokey) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1808>

### Tape 1

00:44 **Chris can you give us a summary of your life?**

I was born in 1953, 11th September, a bit of an ominous number, 11th September 1953 in Woomera.

01:00 My father worked for corps of signals [Royal Australian Army Signals Corps]. Have noticed any of the 110-foot antennas you see around Australia, my Dad built them, corps of signals. After several postings with the family, so to speak, Melbourne became home base for the family. After school I attempted several apprenticeships,

01:30 I'm not saying I'm a bit of a renegade but Mum and Dad always knows best, I'm finding that out now with my kids. After school like I said apprentice pattern maker, didn't like that all that much so approximately June 1972 I joined the army. After my basic training

02:00 we were all pretty eager to get over to Vietnam, but by the time I finished my corps training in the corps of signals they called it off. Again I had my posting cancelled to go to Singapore because Vietnam was being scaled down and I missed out on another overseas posting. Served with several units throughout Australia,

02:30 mainly field force units, 2 Sig [Signal] Regiment, with 103 Sig Squadron, a TF [Task Force] in Townsville. So 21 years service, leading towards Cambodia, I should go back, married in 1975, I missed that bit, four lovely kids, lovely wife

03:00 and after several posting all around Australia, my kids suffered a little bit with their education system as far as moving every couple of years. Continued on. I suppose our kids saw more of Australia than most kids ever will. My final posting prior to going to Cambodia was at 134 Signal Squadron in Sydney and because of my background in the Signal Dispatch Service as a base driver,

03:30 that's my base trade, if you can imagine Mel Brooks running through the trenches, well that's us, but a little bit more involved than that. It's basically delivery of hard copy messages through all levels. My background, because of that, I think I was, you could call me a bit of a dinosaur as far as

04:00 the old dispatch rider as a trade is concerned because my background and the present posting I had in Sydney in 1990-1992 had an extremely large command of air military service and because of that background that I had I think that was the main reason they chose me to go to Cambodia to

04:30 raise and establish an extremely large courier system within Phnom Penh and an air dispatch service throughout the country. In regards to that, cut there to get my train of thought going.

05:00 All in all I served a total of 21 years with the army. As I said my base trade was an actual driver within the corps of signals where, apart from the normal driving duties, I was the transport supervisor where I conducted drivers' courses for the trucks, Land Rovers, motorcycles, which is the base trade of a 381 transport supervisor in the corps of signals.

05:30 21 years service. Shortly after I returned from Cambodia, I was posted to (UNCLEAR), which was the old 26 Sig Regiment where it was disbanded and sent to Cambodia and it now no longer exists. A posting back here in Townsville, where the vote was put around the family, time is coming to retire, where do you

06:00 want to settle? The kids basically said Townsville, so we've been here ever since. After my discharge at midnight 1994 because of a few administrative problems the army was having with people in the corps of signals. They got rid of drivers, storemen and clerks so I had to go to a different corps. I said, "If I wanted a wagon wheel to go to corps

06:30 transport, I would have asked for one." So out of protest, I took discharge at midnight in 1994 so I wouldn't have to wear a wagon wheel on my hat, out of protest so to speak. Shortly after my discharge I took, when you consider retirement, you know, I don't have to do anything too stressful, so I got a job as

a bus driver

07:00 come janitor of a local, rather large Catholic school in Townsville for a period of 18 months. I said, "I don't like this, besides I'm not making enough money," so just thinking back, "So, what are you good at?" I was a driver/trainer licence-testing officer in the army so I just rings up the Queensland Transport and they basically said, "When can you come? I've got a job opening for a driving examiner."

07:30 So that's how I started with Queensland Transport for a period of five years as a driving examiner. As I suffer from PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], I basically took retirement again and because of that I got my TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] pension. That's where I am at the moment. Enjoying life. My wife and I really

08:00 enjoy the association with the local four-wheel drive club here in Townsville, the Townsville and Districts Four-Wheel Drive Club. We're very involved, Lorraine is the secretary and I'm a trip coordinator and driver/trainer. So we get out and about and a great bunch of people and a good group of friends. That's basically it as we stand.

**Fantastic. That was a great life arc, thank you. Let's go back to the beginning. Can you tell us about your early childhood?**

08:30 It was quite a good childhood actually. Don't remember too much about Woomera, apparently I glow in the dark because I was born on the day they had a nuclear detonation, not far from Woomera, and it wasn't Maralinga, it was Woomera. A lot of people don't know that.

**Did you parents tell you much about that ?**

Yeah,

09:00 **What did they say about it?**

Not a great deal. Yes it happened. I've heard all sorts of stories about children born in that period of time about how they can get compensation, but I'm not interested in that sort of stuff, unless I start glowing brighter of a night. I was pretty good in the jungle. We had quite a good childhood. I've got a brother and two sisters.

09:30 My father served for 13 years in the corps of signals as a linesman rigger, he's very good at building towers all over the place, you'll see antenna palms all over the country, my father had a hand in that. After we moved to Melbourne, yeah quite a good childhood. In fact our street is still a dirt street in Avondale Heights in Melbourne, about the only dirt street in the suburbs in Melbourne area. From there

10:00 my parents moved from there to Bundoora, northern suburbs of Melbourne, quite a good area. Very involved in Australian Rules football, my father's an ex-Carlton player and I was 17 I had run in with the Carlton Colts and again when I was 18. Not big enough, not good enough but I went there on the father-son rule, in fact a mate of mine, Barry Armstrong, played 200-odd games for

10:30 Carlton, we both went to the colts together. As far as the football goes I've had a ball, and not long after I joined the army.

**What about your education? How did you enjoy school?**

Very mixed. Hated school and I only got to what do they call it up here, Year 10. Then a trade school.

11:00 Basically one of the reasons I ran away and joined the army was that I found it a bit tough because of the trade I chose, which is a pattern maker, which is a cross between a carpenter, a draughtsman, a moulder; it's everything you see around in everyday life it's made by a pattern maker and is moulded into steel or plastic or whatever. A bit too tough as far as the mathematics was concerned so I pulled out and joined the army.

11:30 **What didn't you like about school?**

I grew up, not so much our suburb because there was no high schools at the time, I had to ride my bike to two, three kilometres to West Heidelberg Technical College, real rough area, always into fights and blues and never got on as far as some of these characters are concerned, a couple of who I met a few years later and sorted that out.

12:00 The general area, Reservoir, West Heidelberg, no one was interested in schooling and education system in those days and it was absolutely lousy. Mainly the curriculum was that of, designed more for the academics,

12:30 they didn't think too much about the trade side of things.

**What did you and brother and sisters do for entertainment?**

Entertainment? I can't really speak for them.

**What did you do together?**

A lot of camping with the family, camping, fishing really that's the whole family enjoyed the camping

side of life,

- 13:00 which sort of rubbed off on me and our family loves camping because we're out and about all the time. My brother was, he basically went to the same school as I, he did very well and become an electronics technician and one sister's a chef and the other is a health worker with disabled people.

**What were your parents like?**

Fine.

**What sort of people were they?**

- 13:30 Mum was a bit of a Bible basher [religious] and that didn't rub off on me. My father followed, not so much followed, but just to keep Mum happy. The religious side of things, yeah, I still have my faith but I don't go overboard.

**What sort of religion?**

Protestant as Lutheran. I suppose you'd call it a German background on my mother's side. Our father's side is Irish.

- 14:00 **What did your father tell you about his wartime experience?**

He didn't actually serve overseas. He nearly went to Korea. He was in, I'm not sure if it was the reserves, but he was in the commandos there for a while in Melbourne. Mainly he was just full on erecting antennas all over the place.

- 14:30 Digger's Rest district north of Melbourne, north west of Melbourne, I presume it still exists but it was hundreds of acres of antennas. His part of the defence comms [communications] net throughout Australia and across the world.

**What did you think of him being in the army?**

I always looked up to him. Had a pretty good relationship with Dad. He passed away in

- 15:00 1987 with a stroke, that was pretty devastating. I never had a real lot to do with him to be honest, because once I joined the army I hardly ever saw the family. I used to help to support Mum and keeping in close contact, but the fact that she was in Melbourne makes things a little

- 15:30 bit tough sometimes, but we still get down there every couple of years.

**What about your grandfather? What did you know of his war experience?**

I've got all his army records because he was a knocked on the head on the Sandakan Death March in Borneo. I've got all his records and medals. I'd still like to visit Borneo one day because I think he's, I don't whether he's actually placed

- 16:00 there or he's commemorated at the Balikpapan War Cemetery. I've lost all contact with Dad's side of the family, died off or just lost contact. I'm in the process of trying to get some more information about my grandfather. A lot I have from army war records, but I'm in the process of finding out about my

- 16:30 great-grandfather whom I adored and I met him when I was about 10 or so and used to love going over. He had a lot pride in bringing his two medals out. He was an assault pioneer in the French line, Belgium. He was one of the tunnel rats, he used to mine underneath the German trenches and blow them up.

**In World War I?**

Yes.

- 17:00 **Do you remember him speaking about it?**

In those days I probably wouldn't have had a clue what he was talking about, but he took a lot of pride when the grandkids came around he would always bring the medals out and have a tear in his eye. He passed on when I was about 10 or 11.

**When you heard those stories about the war as a boy, what did you think about war?**

Romanticised it, I

- 17:30 presume. Virtually part of our culture, not that Australia is a war-mongering country or anything, it's part of our culture and damned right Anzac Day should be a public holiday.

**What did you think about your great-grandfather?**

I idolised him. We've got satellite TV [television] now and Lorraine, my wife, may get a bit annoyed sometimes when

- 18:00 I'm watching the History Channel because I find it quite interesting what our fellows went through and

trying to compare what I went through is nothing. It's a shame that governments in the past haven't supported our veterans as much as they should have.

**So you never knew your grandfather?**

No. No. In fact my father was only about 13 years old I think,

18:30 when they got the news. I've got all the telegrams, all his letters, half a dozen letters that were allowed to be sent out from Changi where he was originally, not sure about the Burma railway but I believe he was there as well. I've got his old photos and medals and his service history and later on this year Lorraine and I are going over to Ireland to chase up some of our family roots. Hopefully I'll get some more information

19:00 about my great-grandfather, Mick Farrell.

**Your grandfather was a POW [Prisoner of War] in Changi?**

I believe so, because that's where all the Sandakan people originated from, left over from the Burma Railway, from Changi they were over to Borneo and I presume there are only three that survived out of so many thousands. The only story I really have is

19:30 that grandfather was actually a cook in the infantry and he got caught stealing a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK to feed his mates and they knocked him on the head. So basically I have no love for the Japanese and of all the literature that you can read, they just deny anything happened.

20:00 If it did, it was out of their control or anything like that. Quite a resentment there, born in here. That's only a story from a great auntie I don't even know if she's alive any more, I don't know where she is. They had a very close relationship and that's just one story that come out as far as one telling and another as to what happened.

20:30 I don't think the war records can even sort of explain how or what happened, just part of the death march and that was it.

**Has your father or anyone else in the family spoken about the sort of man your grandfather was?**

Not really. There are a few skeletons in the closet. Grandfather was originally from New Zealand, allegedly there's a bit of Maori royalty in me,

21:00 don't know how, but there is. No, my father never spoke about him. Grandfather and grandmother were never married. In fact, there is another family tucked away in Melbourne somewhere that we've just recently found out about. So he was a bit of a scoundrel apparently. Different kettle of fish to my great-grandmother - sorry, my grandmother on my father's side. Her mother, my gran,

21:30 she was never married to Mick Farrell either. As the story goes, during World War I she married a Mick O'Farrell who was killed at Gallipoli and she remarried to a Mick Farrell without the "O" so work that out? Still pretty keen on tracing some of our ancestors back on my father's side. So that's where the Irish and the Germans intermingle.

**22:00 How did having a grandfather and your great-grandfather's war experience, growing up with that knowledge, how did that effect you?**

Personally a little bit of patriotism. Not so much the romanticism side of things, but I guess just doing one's bit.

22:30 It's a good career; I would advise anyone to join the army. A good outlook of life. You learn the basics of mateship, and it sticks with you. That's where some of these dole bludgers that are in the place should be conscripted and work for the dole for a couple of years in the army and they'll have a better outlook on life. It's just not so much the discipline side of things but life values, which isn't drummed into you but

23:00 you pick it up as you go along and you learn good values of life. You can go anywhere. That's my belief anyway.

**Did that army background in your family influence you in any way regards to joining the army yourself?**

Not necessarily. I was a lost soul so to speak, you know, 18 years old and not too good at school but that's a different kettle of fish after serving 10 or

23:30 15 years in the army I've started doing education courses and I did quite well, so work that out. Maybe I didn't have fortitude when I was at school, too interested in playing footy.

**Were you a good footballer?**

Oh, if I was another two or three inches taller and a bit more bulky then maybe I would have done all right. I played

24:00 senior footy in Brisbane, Gold Coast as well, while I had postings up here in Brisbane. I did all right. I didn't make a lot of money or anything, but it paid for petrol and a bit of accommodation here and there.

**As a boy did you attend any Anzac Day marches?**

Only with Mum and Dad on the sidelines in Melbourne, for example, we'd have half a million people along Swanston Street.

24:30 I don't believe you get the same crowds that they used to in the 1960s or 1970s.

**What do you remember thinking about those days?**

The romanticising and looking up to the normal Joe on the street who actually put his hand up and did his bit. I don't think death scared them as much as what a lot of people realised.

25:00 You get bumped on the head, "Oh well, I did my bit," that's it. You'd have your flag and you'd be waving it, used to love it as kids going on Anzac Day. I still revisit the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne whenever I'm in Melbourne. Just a few thoughts on your own and not so much meditating life or anything, just reflecting on those who did

25:30 their bit and sacrificed their lives for Queen and country even though I'm a Republican.

**Can you tell us the story behind the photograph of yourself young and dressed up?**

Quite often and even that early photo was taken out in the barracks in Darwin, Northern Command Headquarters, and from that time on Mum used to make me little uniforms.

26:00 When Dad got posted to Melbourne when I was five, six, ten, I had my own uniform. Dad used to let me wag school and I'd go to work with him at an army installation and poke around, it was great. Had my own little corporal uniform. It was lovely.

**So you liked that whole environment, army environment?**

26:30 Even some of the functions that Mum and Dad used to go to, the good old Christmas function or whatever, the mateship and the camaraderie sort of hit me at an early age and sort of stuck with me.

**So you worked as a pattern maker when you left school? Did you do a course?**

I didn't even get that far. I was there for not quite 12 months.

27:00 I was lacking in mathematics for starters and went to night school, no interest, but all the firm I was working for made was sewer grates and storm water drain covers. That was real exciting.

**You said that you were a bit of a lost soul, why was that do you think?**

Really I had no,

27:30 not so much encouragement from my parents, but I just didn't know what to do with myself. Left school at 17, too interested in playing football and I got a couple of jobs as a dispatch clerk for some Jewish clothing manufacturer in Melbourne. Just Jeans rings a bell. I didn't like that at all considering

28:00 I was \$15 a week; I was getting \$18 a week as a pattern maker. That was about \$10 below the national wage in those days, this was the 1970s, and I said, "No, no, this is no good." I think my first fortnightly pay in recruits was \$58 I think it was. That was a

28:30 fortune in those days as far as I was concerned. By the time Labor got in the wages tripled. 1973 I think it was, I was rolling in it. Well you consider today the average wage it doesn't sound much but a couple of hundred dollars a fortnight was big money in those days I thought.

**Can you describe the atmosphere at the time in the 1960s?**

In the 60s?

29:00 **Yeah what you can remember of the late 1960s in terms of the changes that were going on in Australia?**

Prior to decimal currency, not a bad childhood, all my mates we were on our bikes and we were off, you wouldn't see us until the end of the day. We got up to all sorts of mischief. Did our best trying to kill ourselves. Some of the antics that we got up to, made the

29:30 biggest water swing in the world, under a big trestle bridge in Keilor, I think this thing was 250 feet high, but anyway stupid things like that. It was a happy childhood, never got into trouble or anything, nothing nasty or anything like that. Just normal Australian kids getting up to mischief.

**What about as a teenager? What did you know about the revolution in drugs and sex and everything that was going on?**

30:00 Nothing. It was about, but I didn't have my first joint until I was about 19, not long after I joined the army. Didn't like it. A bit of a buzz a couple of times, but that was it. No interest whatsoever, apart from

30:30 the fact that I rattle with all the drugs that I take at the moment, medication. Never really got into any mischief, well I didn't get anyone into trouble anyway. Just the normal teenage childhood.

**What sort of music did you enjoy back then?**

Oh, do you have to ask that? I don't think you'd know them.

**You'd be surprised.**

All right. Grand Funk Railroad.

31:00 Told you, some American heavy metal group in those days, late 1960s. Led Zeppelin, not much in the way of Australian pop music, I suppose The Beatles and The [Rolling] Stones, Eric Clapton and another one you may not know, Leon Russell.

31:30 Didn't think so, he was Joe Cocker's pianist; he used to wear a big top hat. So I didn't think you'd know too many of them.

**Was music important to you?**

Yeah, you'd have the radio araldited [glued - 'Araldite' brand glue] to your ear all the time. Go up and down the street, pretty cool with your comb hanging out of your back pocket and that sort of stuff. Used to be a couple of local dances and all that sort of stuff. Just the

32:00 normal things that were in suburbia.

**What do you remember was the first thing that you heard about the Vietnam War?**

I was at school, my last year of school, and it would have been 1970 and we had an army recruiting unit giving us a bit of a lecture. I put my hand up, "I want to go." Better than going to school. As it turned out, I was in the army the following year anyway.

32:30 It was June 1972. So a few odd jobs, tried the apprenticeships, no good, tried something else, dispatch clerk and that nail on the head, join the army.

**When that recruiting officer came around to your school, what did he tell you about the Vietnam War?**

Not so much, virtually nothing about the Vietnam, just basically adult training schemes,

33:00 you could do a trade, not specifically about infantry or shooting guns or cannons or anything like that. From what I recall, it was mainly trade related, and some of the trades you can get into in the army. A lot of questions flew amongst the kids about Vietnam but didn't really touch on it that much.

33:30 I don't know if you call it lateral thinking or reverse psychology I don't know but they're pretty good at their job anyway.

**When you put your hand up that day, and nothing happened after that?**

No

**Why was that?**

Too young. My parents reckoned I was too young. I was bright-eyed enough to have a crack at it and join the army.

**So by the time you came to join the army, what did you know about what was happening in Vietnam?**

34:00 Very little. Most of it was censored anyway. The news only presents what they think the public wants to know. Not about daily reports of '15 Australians got killed in this particular area' or land mines or anything like that. They wouldn't go into the nitty gritty and

34:30 my ears would prick up every now and again because of some of the statistics that were coming though. I thought, "Well that sounds all nice and glorified but what about the blood and guts?" They don't portray it and still to this day they still don't, unless the media want to sensationalise it, like you see in Iraq at the moment. The American press love to see a bit of blood and guts on the footpath.

**What did you think about the protests about the Vietnam War?**

35:00 Hated them. Detested it. Unpatriotic. Not so much for the actual cause, but the fact that we had Australian troops over there, most of them willing, a few not so willing. You've heard about rent-a-crowd and all that type of scenario, the Labor jumping on the bandwagon,

35:30 which basically put them into power anyway, I actually detested it. I thought it was un-Australian and I didn't like it very much at all, even at my age.

**Did you think we should have been in Vietnam at that time?**

No. No, it was long protracted situation. It's all political. Shouldn't have been there in the first place. The Americans

- 36:00 created their own situation. Americans could have won that in the first year if they'd have wanted to. They could have waltzed in.

**Back when you were 18 and joining the army, what were your thoughts then about us being in Vietnam?**

Oh, climbing over each other's backs trying to jump on the next plane. Prior to that, I couldn't walk up and down in

- 36:30 Melbourne in uniform because some idiot would beat you up or attempt to. I had a few situations where I got into street fights in the middle of town because someone called me a skinhead, because of my army haircut. So "Biff," cop that. No, that was the situation. Advised never to go alone, never wear a uniform out of the barracks.
- 37:00 I found that very unsettling even when we had protestors at the front barracks, it got very ugly there a few times too.

**So can you tell us about joining up? What were the principal reasons for you joining up?**

A lot of it advice from my father. I wasn't do all that well at school,

- 37:30 I proved myself later on as far as educating myself, did quite well. I use the war 'romanticising' and 'glorifying' and all that sort of stuff, no, it was nothing like that. I just thought it was, virtually a goal to go for, a
- 38:00 way of basically making myself a career. Even though I had the wrong perceptions about the army after the first three years because I got married. Away for nine months of the year, I didn't like the idea of the new bride being left behind with a little baby girl. So I took discharge and got out for two years and reenlisted.

**The day you joined up, what was the situation, can you describe the scene of joining up?**

- 38:30 I was only one of very few regulars in my platoon, the rest were national service. I did pretty well at Kapooka considering I was back-squadded for about three weeks, so I could play in Kapooka's grand final side. That's another story. I had a pretty good time at Kapooka. They found out who I was playing for as far
- 39:00 as footy goes. They had to think of some sort of excuse to keep me back so it was, "I can't handle a weapon." I ended up walking out of Kapooka as a marksman, and that doesn't happen very often when you're at Kapooka, doing that, the basic training. I had a good time. I played a lot of footy while I was there. Did quite well.

**Can you tell us a little bit about the training?**

- 39:30 Tough. Pretty tough. My platoon sergeant had already done two or three tours of Vietnam and he was a bit schizo [schizophrenic] so apart from that, I wasn't receiving any special favours or anything I did everything that everyone else did except Wednesday and Thursday night footy training and playing on the weekend. It was a good excuse to get out of basic training.
- 40:00 It was a lifestyle when you weren't allowed to have a beer for six weeks.

**When you say that your platoon sergeant was a bit schizo what do you mean?**

A lot of it could be hearsay, it's human nature, you get rumours flying around everywhere, but one platoon corporal and other platoon sergeant tell me that he mutilated a Viet Cong because he shot his best mate. They shot him

- 40:30 from the bottom up, very slowly. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. I'd do the same.

## **Tape 2**

- 00:30 **In Kapooka can you describe some of the training exercises that you were involved in?**

A lot of running. Basically for some reason, compared with what they do today, there was very little hand-to-hand type training. Like they taught bayonet drill, close-quarter fighting

- 01:00 and all that sort of stuff. Something we picked up as we went along anyway. A lot of running, a lot of walking. That's one thing my father advised me to do, after you progressively go through basic training,

they'll interview you as to which corps you'd like to go and what would you like to do. A lot of times they'd let you have your preference, let you go to engineers to be a driver of big dump trucks or

01:30 plant operator or if you wanted to go to the infantry if you liked shooting guns or something like that. Or be a radio operator, which I said I wanted to be, and basically from the advice my father gave me, "Never join the infantry because all you do is walk everywhere and dig holes. Join the corps of signals, you've got trucks, Land Rovers to drive everywhere and all that." Sort of proved him wrong there because

02:00 in my field force units I was doing a lot of walking, with your house on your back and dig holes or move that hole over there. After you've moved that hole, put another one there. Because the corps of signals was an arm same as the infantry, engineers, artillery, corps of signals even has communications and is still an arm.

02:30 That's where that theory went down the shute. It was all right, it's basically self-defence, defensive positions and all that sort of stuff. Once you got used to it didn't really worry me.

**You had an idea, you said earlier, about camaraderie that was involved in the army. How did you observe that when you first started training?**

I've got

03:00 friends from there for the rest of my life. I've still got friends that I still keep in contact. Very, very close friends. So you pick up your friends as you go along, but anyone's a mate, sure you have your disagreements, it's part of human nature, but the camaraderie you'd never find outside the army, except on a footy team.

03:30 **So you felt that from the word go?**

Oh yeah. You're taught that basic instinctive mateship before you even get on the bus to go to Kapooka, because I skulled down six pots of beer with this mate that I made friends with in the hotel before we jumped on the bus. He's been a friend of mine ever since.

04:00 Even though I've made a few stops along the way in a hurry, that's something that's bred into you.

**Can you tell us about that friend?**

I think he's a drunk and a hopeless bum at the moment.

**What about back then?**

We're quite good friends, in fact one of them was a best man at my wedding. I actually served with him in Cambodia.

04:30 So the mateship side of things is part and parcel of army life and it's not drummed into you, you just learn it. I doubt there is any other institution in our society where you'd learn it, apart from different types of services of course.

**What were you first impressions of the army?**

First impressions?

05:00 Damned big organization. Took you a little while to learn a chain of command. It took a little while to learn. All in all, to put a finger on it, it's pretty hard to explain right here and now. A bit daunting,

05:30 a bit awesome as far as an 18 year old is concerned. Once you learn the first few steps of the chain of command, the platoon corporal, the sergeant, platoon commander and the anti-Christ who may be the OC [Officer Commanding] or whoever, it's a generalised term.

**You spoke earlier about your platoon sergeant and you told that story.**

06:00 Whether it's true or not.

**What was he actually like?**

The Sadist. He'd have us on a drill square for hours and hours and hours and if we didn't do it right, he'd keep us there. If you got on the real bad side of him, he'd have us up all night changing uniforms. Or you've got five minutes to get into your pyjamas back on parade square, "Right, run away and go put your service dress on."

06:30 He nearly yanked the finger off one of our fellow recruits because he wore a dress ring and he didn't like it so he tried to tug it off and nearly took his finger off. But he didn't do nothing, let him stand there bleeding. Gunther his name was. Yeah he was a hard man. I think he was missing a few roos [kangaroos] from the top paddock [not very intelligent]

07:00 because he'd already done two tours of Vietnam and probably picked the wrong person to teach recruits.



**Did he tell you much about his time in Vietnam?**

No. Not a word. That's the sort of person he was. A lot of us, I looked up to him, but you wouldn't want to put a foot wrong because he'd be on top of you like a tonne of bricks. I, being

07:30 young and impressionable young soldier, I'll go by his rules. That's the type of person he was. There were other platoon sergeants that I knew and they were pretty casual going sort of fellows. From the time I'd become a sergeant myself, shit I wouldn't treat a person like that, I'd rip his face off maybe but not to the point of being a sadist.

08:00 **Despite all this, you looked up to him?**

Yes, or else. I suppose that's the best way to describe it. If you had a problem and you asked him or fronted him, he'd look after you, so that was probably one of his methods of indoctrination. If you had the guts to come up to him and say, "Listen, I've got a problem,"

08:30 he'd sort it out without ripping your face off. That's one of his personalities. We thought he was a bit of a schizo.

**Did he influence you in any way?**

Yeah.

**How so?**

He had a lot to do with the Aussie Rules football side of things, but putting that aside,

09:00 yes, he may have had a heavy hand or a heavy-handed approach to things, to most things, but generally knew what he was talking about, but I think I would have done it a different way. I have more of a personable leadership quality, not dominating or overbearing because it doesn't work with the general

09:30 soldier.

**Can you describe a typical day at Kapooka?**

I used to hate the bugle in the morning, five o'clock or whatever it was and if you got dixie bashing, working in the kitchen for the day, "Oh this is great," I used to love it, eat as much as you like and just scrub a few pots and pans for the day and back into it the next day.

10:00 No it was all right.

**After the bugle, what happened then in a typical day?**

Basically ablutions, clean the ablutions, brekkie [breakfast], and out the front waiting, lined up as a platoon waiting for the platoon sergeant and his little lap dog would be yapping at your heels, the little platoon corporal

10:30 and until he turned up, you generally had a syllabus to go by and what was next and whether it was going to be weapons lessons or sex education and venereal disease and films and all that sort of stuff, you generally knew what was up. We could be going to the range or going for a five k [kilometre] march, something along those lines, but you knew what was on for the day anyway.

11:00 **As a young impressionable soldier, how did those VD [venereal disease] films affect you?**

Shocking. I've got a clean record. A bit eye-opening. These are 1940s type American films and some of the techniques for cleaning that sort of affliction was quite scary.

**Can you tell us about what you saw?**

11:30 They tell you the difference between gonorrhoea and syphilis and these are 1940 type American education films and you soon knew what the difference between gonorrhoea and syphilis was; you'd be walking around with a wheelbarrow with the nuts to be straightforward. And all the other types of diseases and some of the remedies they had in those days was pretty scary.

12:00 **Such as?**

They had this, don't think they use it these days, an implement basically designed that looked like an umbrella and they'd up the eye and rip it out. That would be worse than torture. So luckily I've got a clean record.

**So you were influenced by those films?**

Oh yeah.

12:30 Yeah be very careful, yes. Basically they worked.

**Before you joined the army what did you know about sex?**

Oh, I wouldn't be called a seen all know all, but I was just a normal teenager. I knew enough.

**Had your parents spoken to you about it?**

My Dad had.

13:00 I had the old father-son talk; I had that when I was 16 or 17. I just said "Too late, Dad."

**What did he say to you?**

He just patted me on the back, and said, "Be careful." That was about it, only had one talk. I said, "It's too late, Dad." That's it. I was just a normal teenager growing up.

**So during training in Kapooka what were the actual living conditions like there?**

13:30 Just normal. Four to a room, everything is spick and span, rifle where it was supposed to go, socks with a smile on them, everything before you go to brekkie, all the ablutions are done. Fifty to a block, three blocks high and about 20 blocks.

14:00 So it was pretty crowded. There was quite a population there when I went through considering a good proportion of them were national service.

**After being a bit of a lost soul, how did you like the training?**

I enjoyed it. Learnt a lot. Beefed up a hell of a lot. Learnt how to look after myself, mentally and physically.

14:30 It was a good outlook in life, especially when I put my views forward as far as what direction I'd like to go in the army, which corps I'd like to go and that sort of stuff, and they sent me off to the corps of signals. Found it very gratifying considering all the work you put in and at the end of the day they test you and send you where you wanted to go in the first place.

**So how much of a change was it for you after your previous life?**

How did Daryl Eastlake say it? "Hu-u-uge!" Huge change, the whole outlook in life. Sure I had my own group of friends before to a degree, yes, after same school friends and whatever, but a different kettle of fish. More

15:30 adult type friends, same sort of mischief anyway, but mateship sort of, but you learn through Kapooka initially and then corps training and during the courses you actually do you pick up a lot of friends. Those friendships are still rock solid to this day.

**What sort of mischief did you get up to during training?**

Did you have to ask that? Just the normal thing a young soldier

16:00 would do. Without being too specific being a young fellow of course, you want to empty the bags. Yeah, just normal going to parties, pubs all that sort of stuff.

**Can you be a bit more specific?**

I wouldn't like to.

**You don't want to tell us?**

Oh no, I had a few girlfriends and all that sort of stuff. Used to go to the drive-ins and camping and carousing and all that sort of stuff. Just a normal young fellow doing this thing.

**Where did you do all that?**

That was mainly in Melbourne initially until my training. To be specific as far as corps training they were going to put me in as an operator, a radio operator, actually an RKO as an operator,

17:00 radio and keyboard operator. Couldn't type and tone deaf. They tried me as an electronics electrician, maths forget it, ended up attending a drivers course, an eight-week course at Broadmeadows and come out as a driver. Happy as Larry. That's what I stuck to for the rest of my career ultimately becoming a transport supervisor

17:30 and running my own trade drivers' courses and all that sort of stuff.

**Just before we leave Kapooka, the football story, can you tell us a little bit more about what happened and how you were held back?**

They were looking for an excuse to keep me back because this was coming the end of August and into September and Kapooka was part of Wagga Wagga, which is in the Riverina

18:00 competition, which is a pretty tough competition. It's where most of the league footballers come from, a lot of them do anyway. They found this excuse to keep me back because I couldn't handle a weapon, so I was back-squadded to another platoon for three or four weeks. We lost the grand final, but I came out as a marksman because I couldn't handle a weapon initially. I was a pretty good shot anyway.

18:30 As far as the football goes, for the next 10 or 15 years I made every army Combined Services football side, against army, navy, air force, mid-week comp [competition] in Melbourne, it was pretty tough, fire brigade, police and, if Rex Hunt's watching this, he's the reason my nose is a bit crooked because he pushed it down the back of my neck after I

19:00 kicked about five goals on him in the first quarter while he was playing for Richmond.

**Who did that?**

Rex Hunt. I don't remember the brawl, apparently we won it, because we were actually playing Prahran Police, this is 2 Sig Regiment. This is while Rex Hunt was playing full back for Richmond. That's another story anyway.

**What was your position?**

Full forward.

19:30 I was a short forward, 5 foot 11 inches, but I was pretty handy up forward.

**How fast were you?**

I used to run for East Melbourne's Harriers, I was pretty quick. That particular game against Prahran Police, well, I let him have a few words of my own and, "You can't say that to me, sunshine."

20:00 "Whack." My nose ended up in the back of my neck. The sport side of things, I had a ball.

**Tell us about you wanted to be a radio operator, but it turned out?**

Basically tone deaf. As far as Morse code was concerned, can't read Morse, can't be a radio operator. I couldn't type, they tried, they tried

20:30 but I couldn't. So I lost out there.

**Were you disappointed?**

Yeah, a lot of my mates went through and made a pretty good career out of it, it's a pet trade in the corps of signals obviously because the communications side of things. The fact that my brother was half way through his electronics course and

21:00 I thought if he can do it I can, I still dipped out very badly. Maths is not a real strong subject for me in those days, but I proved myself wrong a little later on. Anyway.

**So you moved on to becoming a driver? Can you tell us about your training for that?**

It's an eight-week course at the old Southern Command Trade Training School at Broadmeadows even thought there's a School of

21:30 Transport at Puckapunyal. After the drivers course, I was posted to Sig Regiment for the first time. I think in total of 21 years I had about four postings to Sig Regiment, so after the trade training as a driver, I got posted to the Sig Regiment.

**What sort of training exercises did you do?**

Mainly communications apart from the odd driver's courses that they'd run.

22:00 It's mainly in support of the regiment in so far as the normal logistical side of things as far as transport's concerned but also SDS, Signal Dispatch Service, the old dispatch riders, when you are basically delivering both mail, official mail and personal mail and messages.

**22:30 In these early days in your training, were you still hoping to get to Vietnam?**

Yes. This would have been mid-1973 and it was still tapering down until 1975, no one was getting posted back, they were just gradually withdrawing.

**Do you remember the soldiers coming back?**

Oh yeah.

**What do you remember about that?**

23:00 Basically getting, like I said a lot of them were national service, a lot of them enlisted in the regular army after Vietnam. There were hundreds and hundreds of them at Watsonia in particular where they were debriefed and getting processed to be discharged, wherever, quite a lot, hundreds.

**23:30 What do you remember about the way they were treated when they returned to Australia?**

We thought that they were above us so to speak. We had the old boots and gaiters, shocking looking things, and we'd be looking at them marching around and they'd have their GP [General Purpose] boots, "Gee wish we could have some of them," and their greens. We looked up to them.

24:00 **What did they tell you, if anything, about their experiences?**

Personally I didn't get much feedback from the ones that I met. They were pretty withdrawn and kept to themselves. You'd see them at the club of a night and generally they kept to themselves. A few blues, a lot of blues, but generally they kept to themselves.

**The blues between who?**

24:30 Us. It's a natural thing to happen, you get a few beers under the belt and you're bullet-proof.

**What were the blues about?**

Oh anything. Nothing nasty, get a few mouses under the eye, a fat lip that was about it. It wouldn't go any further than that. That's a general thing that happens in the army, if you get beat up that's it, you don't get beat up more,

25:00 which happens out in the streets. If you get a fat lip you take it on the chin and that's it. You cop that one and you leave it at that. It could be over the most miniscule stupid petty thing, it'll happen, it'll happen in any pub I guess. It's human nature. A few turps [drinks, beers], bulletproof.

**Did you get a few fat lips?**

Yeah of course I did. I'm not exactly

25:30 a pug or anything, I'll duck and weave and I'm out of there, I'm pretty good at that.

**What are your thoughts about the way the Vietnam vets were treated by the general public?**

I guess that's why they were pretty well withdrawn because they didn't deserve what they got. I witnessed quite a few cases, they'd be

26:00 walking down the middle of Melbourne and someone's throwing something at them and they'll go after them and they'll beat the bejesus out of them. Just getting the frustrations out of the system. Someone will curse them and they'll turn around and walk up and go 'whack', good on them. They didn't deserve it.

**So you witnessed that a few times?**

Yeah. Yep, I was with them a couple of times.

26:30 Even in uniform as young soldiers do, go into town and meet up with a few girls and whatever and generally you're well accepted, make new friends and stuff, but you'll get certain elements out of the community who, even when in the marches, they'll get stuff thrown at them and they'll just retaliate.

27:00 And I say again "Good on them."

**You said that you were with them a couple of times, were you involved in any way?**

Only on the odd occasion, but not really.

**What sort of things did you hear people saying to them?**

"You child killer!" "You woman raper!" and all this sort of stuff. "Murderer!"

27:30 "You baby killer!" And they'd go off their bloody nana [head]. Of course I would, very hurtful. Even though I didn't make it over there, oh I did later, but I'd do the same thing. You call yourself an Australian.

**What were your thoughts at that time about what Australia had been doing in Vietnam?**

28:00 They were doing good work. Damned a lot better than what the Yanks were doing. Like I said, the Americans had a completely different agenda. If they wanted to, they could have finished that in six months, 12 months, they had a protracted, drawn out political agenda,

28:30 whatever they had, they could have cleaned it up a lot quicker than they planned to do. They were just dragging in other countries to take the heat off the Americans. Harold Holt being a bit of a lap dog, he sent them over, and Menzies.

**You said a lot of those Vietnam Vets were withdrawn; did you have any knowledge of what they'd gone through over there?**

29:00 A couple of them I spoke to, even the one that I know who actually joined the regular army and is still in, a couple of them are still in. Some of them would say, "Well I had a ball. I was out there sometimes." Another fellow would say, "I didn't actually get out in fields and throw rocks at someone else," they'd do shift work in the communications

29:30 centre, they'd go on R&R [Rest and Recreation] and that's it. Some on the other hand would be attached to an infantry patrol or in other cases quite a few sig men went over to infantry battalions and actively served as a radio operator as part of the platoon. They'd do the hard yards, they've a different

30:00 story again, where they are under fire and firing back at them, also part of an infantry platoon and as such you're an infantryman with a rifle doing the same as what the infantry will be doing out in the field. You get different stories.

**How much of a difference between the people in their demeanour did you observe?**

Some would suffer from their own

30:30 experiences and the others would say, "Well I wasn't comfortable over there, but I didn't exactly..." Like a cook would say, "I've got PTSD because there's mortar shells just down the track," or, "I didn't participate in any aggressive action." You've got those two sides of the kettle.

31:00 **How did seeing the way those Vietnam vets were treated by the public, how did that influence you?**

A lot. From my perspective with the marches, the moratorium, the anti-war movement, made the Australian digger the scapegoat. That's how they got affected more than anything, is the propaganda side of things,

31:30 "baby killers" and "war mongers", that would affect them big time even though you'd put in your best foot, you thought we went over there for the right reasons, but at the end of the day when they came back they got shit thrown in their face, only because the media, the political agendas and the poor old digger cops the lot.

32:00 **How did seeing and hearing all that actually affect you at the time?**

Well I felt for them. I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed to think myself an Australian, even though I'm only freshly enlisted in the army; I felt very embarrassed and hurt, even though I hadn't served anywhere

32:30 and I felt very embarrassed. I think half those egg-throwers weren't even Australian. Now I'm getting into the ethic side of things, rent-a-crowds and the hippies and I thought that was very un-Australian. They should have got a lot more than what they got as far as recognition goes.

33:00 I felt embarrassed.

**You said earlier there were times when you were actually picked on as well?**

Yeah, because of my haircut, I'd get called a skinhead. It had nothing to do with the anti-war movement, "Bring it on, sunshine," that happened a couple of times. You don't see too many skinheads around any more; I think everyone has a short hair cut,

33:30 even shaven heads and all that sort of stuff. In those days, everyone had long hair and if you had a short haircut you were either in the army or a skinhead. I don't know what it was like in the rest of the capital cities, but that was what Melbourne was like.

**How would you describe that training at Broadmeadows compared with what you'd experienced in Kapooka?**

It was a holiday. Just a holiday. You'd do your theory lessons in the

34:00 classroom and all that sort of stuff, but once you got out in the heavy vehicles and the trucks out in the scrub, we had a ball and learnt a lot. Very satisfying and very relieving that I finally got a trade after over 12 months in the army without a trade, going from one course to another and finally picking up a trade.

**How did that change you in any way?**

34:30 Probably grew up a bit. Young and naïve out for a good time, but no, it changed my outlook on life big time and it's not long after I met Lorraine and we got married.

**Can you tell us about meeting Lorraine?**

Blind date. Her ears are burning now. We were married soon after.

**How was the blind date set up?**

An army friend,

35:00 he had a girlfriend, they were both going to nursing school in Toorak. We'd been out bush for three weeks, so you can imagine how I smelt, but still in uniform, suntan cream all over my face and pick up a girl from nursing school and I must have stunk to high heaven. I was only to find out later on that she got off on the smell. She loves it.

35:30 It's not a BO [body odour] smell, it's a bushy smell. She loved it. We had a very short courtship and married on, better get it right, 7 June 1975.

**What did you find attractive about Lorraine?**

Eh? Oh, that's a bit difficult when she's in the same room, but oh no, love at first sight.

36:00 She was taller than me because she had those stupid platform shoes on. No, it was love at first sight. I was cringing in one corner of the car and trying to hold my armpits down, I knew what I smelt like, but apparently she liked it. As I say it's

36:30 not a BO smell, it's a bush smell.

**So you met each other when you were still in Broadmeadows?**

No, Watsonia. Lorraine was going to nursing school in Toorak Road.

**What were you doing at Watsonia?**

That's the headquarters for signals and I was posted to 2 Sig Regiment, the 2nd Signal Regiment, City of Heidelberg. That's where I actually met Lorraine.

37:00 **How were you actually spending your time there?**

Working the normal everyday thing, normal everyday taskings during the day, just like a 9-5, no 8-4 or whatever, but servicing of vehicles, general maintenance, training could be any form of training, infantry, minor tactics or map

37:30 reading or you'd have sport once a week, just PT [physical training] in the morning, just the normal daily life in the regiment. You'd have your parades obviously every morning, get your name ticked off and you'd go to work and have lunch and go home, to the pub whatever. Just generalised maintenance program,

38:00 for want of a better term in preparation for an oncoming exercise.

**At that time, did you have any thoughts about going overseas?**

Nothing really was happening for the next 10 years anyway as far as Australia was concerned, or the army. Yes there were a few contingents going here and there, but not very much. Nothing really happened between 1975

38:30 and Somalia was the first one or Rwanda in about 1990 about 1990 or 1991. But between then and 1975 there wasn't a real lot happening. No.

**So how did meeting Lorraine change your attitude about being in the army?**

Oh, a lot more responsibility for starters. We had four kids under six.

39:00 I grew up in a hurry. I have very large ear lobes, and I was put in my place very quick.

**How old were you when you married?**

21. 21. I was pretty young, not by today's standards I don't know.

39:30 Lorraine was a little bit older than I, not much, just a couple of years older than what I am. Oh no, the chemistry was there I guess, I've been saying the right things.

**How did life change for you when you married as far as your army career went?**

Unfortunately not too good for my part, because I'm away all the time. The kids sort of

40:00 suffered a bit because I was away all the time and Lorraine has been left at home holding the bag. Moving all the time, the kids education suffered a fair bit, changing from school to school every couple of years they lose their friends, they've got to start all over again. That was part of married life I guess, unless you secured a posting for a considerable length of time.

**When you first married, where were you living?**

40:30 Melbourne. Just not long after I got married, I got out for two years and then re-enlisted. Tried my hand at normal everyday life type jobs but really I couldn't fit in anywhere, basically re-enlisted. Virtually all I had to do was put a uniform on, didn't have to go back to Kapooka again or anything like that. Back at the forefront

41:00 and been there ever since.

## Tape 3

00:38 **Can you tell me a little bit more about how the footy was arranged in the army, how the teams were arranged?**

Kapooka had, mainly through the staff people who were posted to Kapooka, they had people

01:00 from like the RAAF base, so they had their own football side and they drew upon when available that they could identify new recruits with a bit of talent they'd sort of approach them and say, "Would you like to get out of this and have a bit of a kick?" and you'd say, "You beaut."

**You played pretty high level footy?**

Yeah.

01:30 **Were the military teams as good as what you were playing?**

Not really, but like I said the Riverina competition is pretty high standard competition itself, considering the Riverina is a hunting ground for the AFL [Australian Football League], always has been. The Dennehy brothers from Essendon to give an example, Wayne Carey,

02:00 people like that. Pretty happy hunting grounds for the AFL in the years gone past and the present.

**Was it disappointing for you that you didn't move into the AFL team?**

Yeah, I had a fair crack at it. It's only Carlton Colts, had a try out for Reserves but didn't get quite that far. Like I said, even though the team that I played for, which is Bundoora,

02:30 which is the Collingwood zone, I went to Carlton under the father-son rule. So I did reasonably well, but if I was a bit bigger and a bit taller I probably would have done all right. I played for different sides close on 20 years. Anyhow I'm suffering from it now, arthritis all over the place. I enjoyed it.

**How did you feel when you knew you could play on teams in the army, did you know it before you went in?**

03:00 Oh yeah. I started under 10's Avondale Heights, northwestern suburbs.

**But prior to joining the army, did you know that the army had teams?**

No, not really, to be honest, no.

**So how did you feel when you found that out?**

Pretty involved with it straightaway.

03:30 **You moved around Australia quite a bit in the first few years. Did they have AFL in the other towns as well?**

No; purely VFL in those days, Victorian Football League. In particular, like Adelaide and Perth would have their own competitions in the late 1970s, early 1980s when West Coast Eagles or

04:00 Adelaide first joined the comp, which was when they formed the AFL. But given that they, states like Brisbane had a pretty solid competition that also involved the Gold Coast, a lot of expatriate Victorians anyway, you had Sydney which always had a pretty good comp even though it's a rugby league oriented state, it's still quite a strong following in

04:30 Australian football, every state in Australia, it's 10 times bigger than Rugby Union or League will ever be. A lot of people don't know that. Especially with people who grew up with rugby in it's various forms. Northern Territory, it's huge, always has been.

**How important has it been to have sport in your army days?**

That's a big part of it, part of army life.

05:00 I've got a lot injuries too numerous to try and remember which one is which, but part and parcel of army life, whether you play golf you have an afternoon off, used to be Wednesdays, it's now Thursdays, whatever, but it's organised sport. You can't just knock off work at lunchtime and go to the pub, it's actually organised sport. Whether it's Australian Rules, rugby, cricket or tennis or

05:30 tiddly winks it doesn't matter as long as it's organised sport and it's a part of your fitness regime. Like with me, you could progress into inter-service competition in Aussie Rules; from inter-service you go into combined services, which is an Australia-wide competition.

**How big was the combined services?**

Pretty competitive, you'd play state on state,

06:00 the army, navy, air force, like Victoria will play New South Wales, Queensland or you go state by state.

**What were the teams that were doing really well in that competition?**

Mainly Victoria and Queensland.

**In the army, navy or air force?**

You have inter-service within the state, army, or navy, air force competing against each other, then they'll pick a side for the combined services, which is army, navy and air force

06:30 and would play state on state, State of Origin so to speak.

**But with the army, navy and air force combined.**

Yes, combined.

**Were you in a combined team?**

I did it 10 years in a row, and off and on for 15 years.

**What was it like when the army, navy...?**

Good. Teammates, mateship, got to know each other, yeah we'd look after each other.

**How would it be organised? How often would you play?**

07:00 It's a, they have competition every year. They have an inter-service carnival, then you'd have a selection process from that carnival into the combined services and then you'd have another carnival, whether it's in Sydney, Brisbane or wherever.

**So is it just one game or a whole series of games?**

Series, over a period of four days, five days. So you play three games of footy in

07:30 four days. Pretty tough at a pretty high level.

**Did you get to many grand finals in that combined comp?**

Yeah a couple. Queensland took it out once. I've been with Victoria, and Victoria's taken it out and New South Wales has taken it out. I happened to be part of three of them as far as taking the finals out. You get to know a lot of people

08:00 around the traps and still retain a lot of mates as you go along.

**Do you get a fair crowd along to that kind of thing?**

Yeah sometimes. One year we played an all-Australian side, which is army, navy, air force would play the curtain raiser at VFL Park, a night game against, what's it called, don't know what it's called now but

08:30 I think it's Melbourne metropolitan competition. It wasn't part of the VFL, but we played the grand final side as curtain raiser for one of the night games at VFL park at Waverley. That was a bit of a hoot in front of a crowd. A few talent scouts grabbed a couple of us, from the AFL.

09:00 **What teams do you support?**

Carlton. Always have, family thing.

**Family tradition.**

Yep. My father grew up in Brunswick in the war years, it was a pretty top neighbourhood and even though you get a lot of Italian, Greeks and every other nationality you can think of lives in Brunswick and Coburg now, in those years it was just battlers, Anglo-Saxon battlers.

09:30 **How important was Carlton to your dad?**

Used to follow them religiously, used to take me up to the members every now and again because he can get into the ex-players association, used to take me up there every now and again as a kid. Used to be able, I don't know how he used to orchestrate it but he used to somehow get final tickets for free from the club.

**What was the best experience of a grand final you went to?**

10:00 1971 I think it was, Carlton and Collingwood grand final. Carlton was 45 points down at half time, gone for dinner and Carlton ended up winning.

**You were there?**

Yes. I watched my hero, Alex Jesaulenko, in fact I played against him once.

10:30 **What was that like?**

I gave him the ball. He was in the QAFL [Queensland Australian Football League] in Brisbane and coaching Sandgate and the fullback falls forward on one leg, I still gave him the ball. I got dragged off the field, my hero.

**Going back into the work you were doing initially in the army before you got married, can you explain some more of that work, what type of things would you do?**



11:00 Putting aside the pattern maker apprenticeship...

**After you got into the army? Like in 2 Sig?**

2 Sig Regiment is made up of three squadrons, support squadron, and far as Vietnam goes 1106 Squadron and 1456 Squadron was synonymous with the communication

11:30 provided during the Vietnam campaign. That's the heavy communications that is.

**What does that mean - heavy communications?**

Big stuff, communicating back to Australia from Vietnam directly and also via Singapore, which is 9 Sig Regiment, which I missed out on, as well. So I missed out on the lot. Day-to-day, just normal everyday barrack life type stuff,

12:00 maintenance, servicing vehicles, getting radio equipment ready up and running in preparation for the next exercise for people who would be coming home.

**What would be involved in maintenance?**

As a driver, servicing trucks and Land Rovers and motorcycles under the guidance of a mechanic in workshop situation where you do all the dirty stuff, changing oil, packing wheel bearings, playing at winch ropes and greasing them up,

12:30 winding them back in, changing tyres, just normal every day maintenance work.

**What were the other blokes like in 2 Sig?**

What were they like? Happy go lucky. Everyone went about their own business as far as their trade was concerned. There was very little antagonism involved as a unit,

13:00 we worked as a team, no real problems as far as I can remember. A lot of the people in the regiment as a wartime basis we had about a thousand people, generally there was only 250 to 300 at any one time. Everyone got along together, supported the football club, used to call ourselves the Piggies, 'two pig regiment'.

**What does that mean?**

13:30 A synonym for 2 Sig Regiment, Sig Pig, we'd have a wild boar as our club mascot, or whatever, later changed to the Lions in Fitzroy colours and we used to have our own mascot, which was a lion from Bacchus Marsh and I used to be a handler for that and it spent a weekend at my place one weekend. So it used to terrorise the local dogs around our neighbourhood,

14:00 with this lion tagging along, only a smallish one of course. Anyway, as a whole a good working group of people. Of course you'd have your clerks doing their clerk stuff and storemen would be folding blankets and counting blankets and drivers are servicing vehicles or changing tyres. The operators getting their radio equipment

14:30 up and running and your technicians repairing radio gear, everyone went along with their own business.

**Were the vehicles changing much in that era?**

No. We had the old Internationals, Series 2 Land Rovers, it was not until 1978 that we got Series 3 Land Rovers and years later the Unimogs.

**What were the Series 2 Land Rovers like?**

15:00 Held together by red back spiders, apart from that a reliable old thing. The red backs used to link arms and hold the things together. Generally very reliable old piece of kit the old International 6-wheel drives, 4-wheel drives, and they weren't replaced til the early 1980s with the Unimogs.

**15:30 What did you find enjoyable about that particular job?**

Only more than anything, the driver-trainer aspect of it. I got very interested in that. Once I got my transport supervisors course out of the way as a corporal I was then able to conduct driver's courses. Most people I've ever had is about a hundred on one course

16:00 that I've run myself and a myriad amount of assistance, driving instructors etc, etc. I got right into that which ultimately brought me into a position with the Queensland Transport as a driving examiner, which I virtually walked into.

**Back in the 2 Sig early days before you got into all of that stuff, what did you find difficult or enjoyable about that particular job?**

16:30 As a young driver you'd be the first off the rank. If we were up in Darwin for example, before and after [Cyclone] Tracey, the poor old 18 or 19 year old drivers would be the first ones they'd grab, "OK we've got servicing to do." Up to your neck in oil, grease and changing oil in the heat, everyone else is down at the pub. So you always used to draw the short

17:00 straw. Oh well I learnt a lot. That would be the worst part I guess.

**What was Darwin like then?**

Dry. Not as green as people think it is in those days. We were up there September/October prior to Tracey and we back again three months later.

**What was it like when you came back?**

Not very pretty.

17:30 In fact my father was Administrative Manager for the Bureau of Meteorology and he flew up to Darwin after Tracey hit and because he's ex-Sigs he rings up the CO [Commanding Officer] of 2 Sig Regiment and immediately got two fully-equipped Land Rovers and communications gear and communicated to the navy ships off shore until the regiment went back up with the heavy radio equipment to install some form of infrastructure.

18:00 I wouldn't say hearsay, but there were a lot more people killed than was documented, because they just didn't know who they were, a lot of them were hippies living in trees, a lot of indigenous people they just had mass graves. Forty-five people I think were documented and there were a lot more than that.

**Did your dad...**

Add a zero

18:30 or two.

**Did your dad have any sort of forewarning that that was coming?**

No. He was only in administration, senior adviser HR [human resources] would be the best way to describe his position back then in administration, HR advisor he would have been.

**How involved was the military in re-establishing Darwin?**

Thousands.

19:00 A lot to do with clean-up, but a lot had to do with infrastructure, engineers, communications. They couldn't bring too many people in too soon because of the sanitation problems and health problems, they had to do it by stages, otherwise it would have been a big crock of shit. So everything had to be done by stages even though it might have been frustrating for a lot of people, you just couldn't bring too many people in,

19:30 otherwise the situation would only get worse.

**What was your role in that?**

Just a driver. I was part of a heavy radio troop but as a driver of a heavy vehicle, with a big shelter on the back. So basically apart from that I helped out with some of the clean up.

**What sort of things did you do?**

20:00 Mainly just cleaning up. Mainly labouring, picking up rubbish and looking for or identifying or finding bodies, cover them up and notify people who needed to be notified. They come along and do their bit.

**Was that the first experience you'd had with that?**

Yes, I'd never seen a dead body in my life.

20:30 **How did that experience affect you at the time?**

Oh a bit freaky. After about a week you find a body in the tropics, it's not real pretty.

**How did the community respond to you guys being around?**

There was only a couple of hundred people there. The rest of the population were evacuated, or

21:00 moved further down but most of the population were air-lifted out anyway either down to Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney or wherever, but a good proportion of them just went down to Katherine and Alice Springs. In those days, it was dirt road from Port Augusta to 20 kilometres south of Alice Springs, all dirt. It was impassable. In fact that's all we did the prior six months, oh three months,

21:30 we just spent weeks hauling semi-trailers out of the bog, because no other vehicles could get in. So you can imagine what Tracey would have done to the landscape further south after the boggy rain in August, September, October. We had the vehicles capable of pulling out semi-trailers with heavy winches and snatch blocks.

22:00 No other vehicle could get in, unless you just leave the vehicle, let her dry up and then pull her out.

**When you first went back there what were you seeing for the very first time after Tracey had**

**been through?**

I didn't recognise a thing. The house I grew up in, Larrakeyah Barracks was still standing amazingly, as old as it was. Utter

22:30 devastation. Didn't recognise hardly any landmarks except for the hospital maybe, the old casino that was still standing, couldn't recognise a thing. I've got a little brother buried at the old cemetery, he died as a baby and his cross was bent over, so I straightened him up and another coat of paint. I've done that three or four times in the last 30 years.

23:00 Very little to recognise.

**How did you feel seeing that?**

In awe, like when you see a telegraph pole, which is made of an old railway line, cut in half by a sheet of tin, that's amazing. A flying piece of tin can cut a steel girder off, that sticks

23:30 in my mind of what it must have been like. A lot of the power poles around Darwin in those early days were actually made of old railway line and they just bent over like pieces of spaghetti cut in half.

**Was there a sense of chaos?**

No. A lot of urgency yeah, but in situations like that when you have the military take over as

24:00 an administrative force, that's why they got the whole population out, like I said too many people there it just turns to chaos. That's why they did it by stages.

**Can you describe some of those stages?**

Water, food, power in that sequence. Sewage is the secondary

24:30 concern, but overflowing sewage obviously the engineers got into the sewage side of things. That's the first priority is your medical, water, food and obviously some form of power.

**You said that you saw bodies?**

I only saw a few, my father told me he saw quite a few,

25:00 including the mass graves. That's where Palmerston, I think it's called, where military installations had been built they just dug trenches, that's what my father told me, he saw quite a lot of people who were documented because he had to do some sort of report as well in his investigations as

25:30 far as the bureau was concerned.

**So he moved out of rigging into meteorology?**

He only served 13 years, he got out in 1963, I think it's 1963.

**And you both ended up in the Territory at that point?**

Yeah. In fact my father was an ex-signaller, in the corps of signals and he just made one phone call and two fully equipped Land Rovers with radio gear. Not long after that all the heavy stuff got airlifted in,

26:00 all the heavy communications. So basically absolute total destruction and obviously the powers that be have certain processes to go through in an emergency. I am just presuming it's medical, water, food and then you worry about power and infrastructure.

26:30 **How long were you up there involved in that?**

Only a couple of weeks. We did what we had to do and, sure there was an ongoing clean up after, there were a lot of engineers and infantry went up, basic clean up before you start to get a trickle back of Darwin's population returning to whatever's left.

**Did you see a significant improvement in two weeks?**

27:00 Oh yeah. All the streets were cleaned, basically you're talking sanitary type stuff: dead pets, undiscovered human remains or cattle or kangaroo or birds, you can imagine the stench. They're the first things you start cleaning up and they attract a lot of flies and feral type

27:30 animals creeping into the suburbs, creates a big health problem.

**Were there any rumours of looting at that point?**

I didn't really hear of any, but I knew some had occurred but not much that I know of.

**What about the media presence?**

They were everywhere,

- 28:00 like flies. Created more chaos than help. They were everywhere. I think there was one person who filmed the lot got preference over all the incoming media. He was there doing the lot, forget, I think he's part of that movie Tracy if I remember rightly, it was based around his, I think he was the editor of the local newspaper, can't remember rightly, but it was based on his recollections and his story about how it happened.
- 28:30 **How do the army deal with the media in a situation like that?**
- Oh, as best as they can. Diplomatically. They've got to stop somewhere. If you've seen the movie The Killing Fields and the media presence, even in Iraq, how they've got to keep the media under control because they just go ballistic. I didn't notice much of that, but they were everywhere.
- 29:00 They had to be quarantined out of certain areas, just because they can be such a hindrance, get themselves hurt or beat up because people don't like the fact that you're getting media stomping the ruins of their house. Take it personally; I would too. I didn't see much of that, but obviously I've read a lot about it and I'm only going by hearsay or watching
- 29:30 movies or all that sort of stuff. Once they get the friends out pretty hard to stop them.
- What happened after your time up there?**
- Back to the unit. In fact I was out of the army not long after that anyway, when I took my discharge. Got married, got out for a couple of years and then re-enlisted. Brought back my service and
- 30:00 continued on.
- In that couple of years that you had off, what sort of jobs did you do?**
- I only had a couple; I was at both for 12 months each I suppose. Just spare parts salesman. There wasn't a real lot going on. I didn't have much of an education, I had to Year 10, but not a real lot to look forward to, you know. In
- 30:30 retrospect, why in the hell did I get out in the first place.
- Why did you get out, what was the reason?**
- Well I'd been away almost nine months of the year, away. I had a new wife, a new baby, "No I've got to find something else." In the end I ended up re-enlisting and we still had a pretty good relationship and as far as the kids, even though we were moving from one place to,
- 31:00 from one end of Australia to another, so to speak, but generally the kids coped pretty well, except for the schooling maybe, losing friends starting anew.
- I know the first few years of marriage are tricky anyway, but did it cause some fights between you two?**
- Not really. The kids were quite small, no real hassles really.
- 31:30 This is army life. I feel badly about it now, in retrospect the kids suffered as far as their schooling goes because between states I think there's a year's difference in secondary education. I think it's been rectified as of this year I think, but in high school there's a year's difference, which makes it hard on the kids going up and down
- 32:00 years and all that stuff. I've got two kids in uni now, and they're doing all right.
- What sort of things did you notice that they were going through with their education? Did you see it at the time or is only now that you can?**
- Mainly Lorraine would have noticed more than me, because I was hardly there. Mainly during the times we were actually in the transition period from
- 32:30 finishing up school, going on holidays and then starting up in a different location or a different school. We were pretty good at making good holidays of our moves, you'd get paid quite well by the army to move, say drive from Melbourne to Townsville for that matter. We generally got our move around Christmas time, so you'd take the annual leave and a few weeks to move and we'd make a good holiday out of it. That sort of eased them into the new location and the new
- 33:00 school. Leaving was pretty hard for the kids, leaving their friends behind. Generally it was OK.
- When you re-enlisted after that two-year break, where was your first posting then?**
- Back to Melbourne, 1276 Squadron, which is the Signal Projects Squadron, which is the first unit my father was in.
- 33:30 The OC, Kilpatrick, happened to be a mate of my fathers. So, obviously his old unit had been renamed since then, but still a driver in a project squadron, which does all the installation work for the army in communications.
- What does installation involve?**

Lots of antennas. Electronic equipment, radio,

34:00 everything that you'd expect in a communication centre.

**So when you'd get a new project to do an installation, what would happen?**

They'd send teams out. I never went on any installation teams, I was just a driver, just doing the normal thing back at the base. You'd have installation teams going out and obviously liaise with contractors like Telecom, Telstra or

34:30 computer firms or whatever and they'd do the actual installation.

**How different was that job?**

Not much different, just like a domestic logistical unit, very small, probably had 50 people in the unit, mainly technicians, a few storemen and the rest would have been riggers. They'd, the riggers, would also travel all around Australia doing installations on existing

35:00 antennas, either bolt painting or replacing.

**What would you do during the day?**

Just normal administration type stuff like running errands, or...

**What sort of errands would you run?**

Picking up stores, picking up antenna sections or could be anything. Mail, could be anything, might have vehicles

35:30 scheduled coming up for servicing, just the normal run of the mill stuff.

**How long were you there for?**

Two years.

**What happened after that?**

Got posted to Brisbane to 4 Sig Regiment, that's quite a large communications unit. It's all part and parcel of DEFCOMNET [Defence Communications Network]. Quite a large number of army units there,

36:00 encompasses up here in Townsville as well. But in this electronic and satellite age, you don't need any units like that any more, just a computer console and a little satellite dish and away you go.

**When did that start to come in?**

Twenty years ago. Recently you'd have state-of-the-art stuff. You'd have obviously all your encrypted stuff for the military,

36:30 still goes through the same system, it's all encrypted so these days all you do now is sit behind a computer console, send an email, or whatever and that's all encrypted it will go all over the world.

**So what was the Brisbane move like? Did you have four kids by then?**

Two, two of the girls up in Brisbane and we were there for nearly five years. It

37:00 suited me, because I was playing lots of football. Another domestic unit operating the signals/service right around the Brisbane area, it was all the official mail and whatever, small amounts of mail but quite a large volume I might add, about 120 odd different units in Brisbane alone and sub units. That was part of our tasking

37:30 was SDS.

**What did that involve?**

That's just mail, courier system. You probably don't need as much these days because, as I said, we're in the electronic age, but irrespective of the electronic age you still need hard copies, hard signed copies not just emails and all this sort of stuff. That's why they still have a courier system of some sort.

**On a day-to-day basis, what would you do with the courier system?**

38:00 Deliver mail on a set route at a set time. That's basically it. You still have contractors, going back then, you had contractors instead of doing it yourself just send off to a workshop or a local contractor when a service is due on a vehicle, just drive her in and pick her up at the end of the day. Not like the old days when you had to do it yourself.

**Did mail ever go missing?**

Oh

38:30 not through our system. There's always complaints of one sort or another, or sending illegal articles

through the military mail.

**What would be classed as illegal?**

Money, flammable liquids – that happened a lot – money would go missing. We wouldn't know what's inside any particular piece of mail. That was an illegal substance, flammable substances, money,

39:00 clothing, anything like that. Just put a strain on whatever resources the army had as far as delivering official mail.

**How difficult was it to settle into that group after being down south?**

No problems. Pretty easy, pretty laid back. Wasn't real hard.

**You slotted into the footy OK?**

Yeah.

39:30 Couple of sides, played for a couple down there. Played for Broadbeach down on the Gold Coast for a couple of years, used to make a weekend of it with the kids. That was OK.

**Was that an army team?**

No. City side in the Gold Coast competition. I got sick of driving down to the Gold Coast twice a week so I signed up with the local QAFL side at Wilson Grange.

## Tape 4

00:30 **After Brisbane, you lived in many places in Australia is that right?**

Melbourne after re-enlistment I was posted to Melbourne 1276 Squadron, which is a project squadron, then up to 4 Sig Regiment up in Brisbane for four and half, five years.

**What happened after that?**

After that I was posted back to Melbourne, 2 Sig Regiment again, for a couple of years.

01:00 Across the road at the School of Signals for a couple of years and posted for the first time up to Townsville, 1036 Squadron part of the ADF deployment force.

**What was it like going back to Melbourne?**

It was OK for the family side of things, but I hate Melbourne, too cold, too many people, too fast, too quick.

**What sort of thing were you doing in that two years?**

Which two years was that?

**In Melbourne?**

Same thing.

01:30 By then I was a Transport Supervisor.

**How did you get to that position?**

Courses as a corporal, as 381 that's a transport supervisor that's where you become a licenced testing officer and a trade driver testing officer, where you can operate and conduct courses, actual trade courses.

**Why did you want to move into those areas?**

02:00 Well basically I was a driver by trade and I was just progressing, basically trade progression, up to warrant officer or officer.

**What did the courses involve?**

Driver assessment more than anything. Man management, driver assessment.

**What would you do to assess? Was it challenging to do those courses?**

To a degree, yeah.

02:30 It's basically to coordinate, operate and conduct the course; you've got to know how to do it to start with. You have, I guess, different types of arrangements where if you're operating a heavy vehicle course or a Land Rover course or even a motorcycle course where you'd have unit requirements to have these people licensed

03:00 whether they're trade drivers and they need a motorcycle licence or a radio operator or rigger who requires to have a heavy vehicle licence to be able to carry out there tasks, where the unit can't provide a driver to do a specific task there'll be someone in that position able to do drive a heavy vehicle with all the equipment. You didn't have that many drivers in the corps, whereas

03:30 you needed to have personnel trained up, that's where we come in to train them up, get them qualified and test them.

**How long would the training take?**

Up to seven to eight weeks. That's a full time course, that's a trade course. Then you get into the realms of intermediate type licences, where it might be a two-week course for a truck where you are restricted to what type of loads and what type of roads you

04:00 can drive on. Then you go to the Land Rovers, drive only, like a restricted licence, you'd be able to drive around the bush as a qualified driver. Or you'd have drivers in the unit that were required to operate a motorcycle plus attend a course, usually a couple of weeks, three weeks where you can basically if there's a requirement for an SDS run on motorcycles

04:30 you'd have a qualified driver to operate the motorcycle. You'd have dispatch riding task or a courier system out bush.

**Is there a different rule or processes for army driving say to civilian driving?**

In those days, it's all changed now of course, but prior

05:00 to the new system in place now where you to attend a driver's course you must have your civilian licence, minimum car licence. In those days, you didn't have to have a civilian licence to operate a military licence. We were under the same convenience for road rules across Australia. So that's all covered under the course anyway. In the early days you didn't have to have a civilian licence to operate a military vehicle.

05:30 **That's changed now.**

Yep.

**What else were you doing in Melbourne over that couple of years?**

Not a great deal. Same old, same old... Whether you're planning or conducting an exercise for example for a driver's course that is coming up, there's a lot of planning involved in that. A lot of time is taken up in that.

**What sort of planning would you do?**

06:00 Training areas, how many students do I have because you'd have a student instructor ratio of two to one, training areas you've got to book training areas, private properties and national parks, classrooms, stationary, instructors, how many instructors do I need? Lesson that have got to be given so you'd identify which instructors are going to give which lessons and they're all formal lessons, no short cuts, 40 minutes lesson and that's it.

06:30 So a lot of planning involved.

**What were the younger blokes like coming through?**

Keen enough. Yeah, we had no real problems. You have your 'aspros' every now and again, you know slow working dopes. Generally all keen as beans.

**What did you like about the training?**

Satisfaction start to finish. Start the training, give them a licence,

07:00 and to be confident enough to say, "I'm confident that he's going to be a good driver." At the end of the day, they come looking for me if something happens. Generally you get a lot of satisfaction from the start of training to handing out that licence over to them with a course report. That ultimately helps them along with their own career progression whether they be operators, technicians it doesn't matter.

07:30 **By this stage of your army career, how old were your children?**

Between two and six, seven, eight about that, we're talking 1980, 1982, 1983.

**What was the hardest thing for you being the father of four and having full on training sessions?**

08:00 Pretty hard sometimes. But we made the best of it on weekends, public holidays, right into camping, gold prospecting or whatever it may be, in the Victorian Alps there we'd find something, a stretch of water and have a fish or pan with the kids. We used to love it. Well I still do.

**Did you and Lorraine together mix with other army couples?**

Yeah. Generally yeah.

08:30 Generally a good bunch of people. We had our own friends, group of friends. Used to socialise quite a bit around, whether it's functions or even especially later when we became a senior we'd have our mess functions to go to and our own bunch of people to mingle with, or whatever.

**Do you think the army was supportive of the family having to move around a lot?**

They did it financially more than anything. Made the move a lot easier.

09:00 There was a considerable amount of money involved in moving a family of six from Melbourne to Townsville, so that's how we used to plan our holidays around each move. Pull them out of school, say goodbye to your friends, have a nice holiday and slowly move back in to a new environment.

**How did Lorraine handle the moves with all the kids?**

Mixed.

09:30 Mixed emotions sometimes. Glad to get out of Melbourne, maybe, start a new life up here for our own little dynasty up here in Townsville.

**What sort of things did Lorraine do apart from her full-on job with the kids?**

10:00 She started off she got a job with the Department of Defence, administration side of things more than anything. That would have been late 1980s early 1990s.

**In Melbourne?**

Both Melbourne and Brisbane and Townsville. So that sort of helped. As far as she could get postings herself and transfers and made things a lot easier, most cases she'd have to

10:30 resign and reapply for jobs and all that sort of stuff, generally she did all right.

**What do you think of all those moves, what was the hardest move for you?**

The last one. I was glad to get out of Melbourne and for our final posting back here in Townsville. Got our first home and basically

11:00 that's it. We went from there.

**So when in all that did you get posted to Cambodia? How did that come about?**

I was posted to 134 Sig Squadron in Sydney and I managed the courier system throughout Sydney, 132 individual units. It was quite a large volume of mail, obviously there's official mail, it's all the administration that comes along with operating

11:30 an army so you're talking a lot of paperwork so hence a lot of mail. Had 25-odd drivers, three or four civilians including Lorraine, she got a job in the mail room franking mail and sorting mail and all the financial responsibilities that goes with the job.

**So you were her boss?**

Yes. Pretty easy with the domestic type unit and she applied through the official channels,

12:00 had to sit for a public servants exam, passed that. Applied for the job and in like Flynn [easily; from the propensities of Errol Flynn, Australian actor, 1930s-1950s].

**What was the most difficult thing about that job for you?**

Probably worrying that nothing in the system goes wrong because you're sort of in the limelight so to speak if anything

12:30 goes wrong with the delivery side of things and you've got to keep the service up because you're on a timetable. Tried many different methods of improving it, it's a sort of self-functioning type system anyway. So once it's in place it runs itself. You've got the financial implications because we'd have our own stamping system so there was a lot of cost and finance involved in regards to the military and

13:00 Australia Post. Basically it run itself.

**How did you approach being in charge of people rather than being in lower ranks?**

Found it pretty easy. All the basic stuff that you learn along the way, once you start getting hooks on your shoulder comes with the responsibility. Once you know you've got that responsibility and

13:30 that power of the finger-pointing sort of comes naturally, for me anyway.

**How did you approach the leadership?**

As I said, I've got a personable leadership quality, don't tend to be overbearing unless it's required, but like I said I have a personable leadership quality, verging on



14:00 the casual side of things, but not too far. They knew where they stood, everybody did their job and very few complaints.

**Did people above you appreciate that style?**

Yeah. It's pretty hard to learn actually, especially if you've got a bit of rank on, people tend to be a little bit overbearing. It's a quality that's pretty hard to learn,

14:30 without ripping someone's face off at the same time at talking to them nice and quietly.

**Do you think in the army there are a lot of people that approach the higher ranks differently to what you would do?**

Depends on the situation and the area they are, it really depends. It's pretty hard to compare a warrant officer say is an RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]

15:00 or you've got a warrant officer who is a clerk. You may have an overbearing clerk and an easygoing RSM, so it's pretty hard to put a finger on it. You will have your overbearing type, dominating type big heads walking around but, all in all, if you get the normal run-of-the-mill senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] his men know where they stand and he knows where he stands with them everything works fine. Ultimately

15:30 you want to work as a team anyway.

**So by the time you were about to go to Cambodia, you'd been in the army for how many years?**

I would have been at about the 19-year mark.

**That's kind of a long service. In that time were you keen to go out into a combat situation?**

I was prepared for it, I was training,

16:00 I was fully prepared for it. Two sides of the story there. One is the main reason I was chosen to look after the mail and official mails system and courier system because of the posting I was already in and my background as far as the SDS system goes. I was doing something twice as big as I was already doing, but I knew what I was doing.

16:30 As far as the preparedness of the sharp end side of things, I had only just come from 1036 Squadron for example and most of my career was in the Field Force units anyway, so you're basically prepared anyway, you know what's expected of you and how to carry yourself and what sort of task you've been given and you just carry it out.

**So how did the offer come to you to go to Cambodia?**

17:00 I was asked and I said, "Yes." That would have been 1991.

**What were you told was happening in Cambodia?**

I knew what was going at the time. We had the lead up with Gareth Evans initiating the peace process. Prior to that I had a fair amount of knowledge of what was happening with the Vietnamese because they'd only just starting pulling out.

17:30 They'd kicked the Khmer Rouge out and as the Vietnamese moved out the Khmer Rouge moved back in, and all sorts of other types of different fighting factions. So I knew what was virtually happening.

**How did you respond when you were asked?**

I said, "Yeah I'll go."

**Why did you want to go?**

Why? I suppose to be honest, one is I'd

18:00 already been to Hawaii, that's fine, that was a two- week exercise, but I'd never served overseas. I felt part of an organization that I'd grown up with virtually to serve on a mission to, I could say, for peacekeeping processes, but I'd

18:30 be looking forward to it.

**How different is it getting ready for a peacekeeping process as opposed to going to conflict?**

Not much difference. We had, you can talk about Rwanda, you can talk about Somalia, and I'd seen the processes and how to go because I've done it. With Cambodia, it was a different kettle of fish. You had a shit load of time to get ready

19:00 and what I did was pretty remarkable anyway as far as getting all our vehicles repaired and painted in an eight week period. I had eight weeks to do it. So we had 200 vehicles, painted and repaired up to standard within eight weeks. That's a lot. That includes trucks, Land Rovers, bikes, trailers, water

purification units, painted

19:30 white. It was a big job.

**Why were they painted white?**

Basically the UN [United Nations] bought them. To be pure and simple the UN bought everything we brought over, we brought most of it back anyway. Each nut, bolt and screw was put on a list, including all your radio gear, everything you can possibly imagine that

20:00 could go, that list went over to Cambodia was bought.

**What other things did you have to do to prepare?**

Primarily my role over there was to provide and raise an aerial dispatch service, a signal dispatch service and a courier system throughout

20:30 the whole country. Little was I to know that after getting in the country the volume was horrendous. The money I was moving around the country was horrendous, unaccountable money, the actual getting ready for the actual commitment was

21:00 very taxing on me in particular. One because of the courier system that I had to raise I had to produce an SOP, Standard Operating Procedure. That had to cover all bases. So when we got into the country I produce an SOP and operate under it.

**How did you go about that?**

[Points to head.] Out of my head, basically.

21:30 Had to raise a timetable, maintain virtually a platoon of drivers, spread them all over the country, keep X amount back in Phnom Penh, operate under a timetable as I said and operate the system under certain guidelines. Like again, no money, that's a secret thing the Australians had because we

22:00 resupplied our own troops. That was a very well-kept secret. Money, rations etcetera, etcetera.

**When you say that was a well-kept secret?**

Corps of signals have always got secrets up their sleeves, always have. "We've lost communications." "Hang on, we'll fix it." They won't tell them they've got a spare radio set or different type of radio set to

22:30 the brigade commander. "Yep," just like that. Meanwhile, the other one's burning away and creating heaps of smoke and fire, but they won't tell them where they got the other piece of radio, they've always got an ace up their sleeve. That's why Sigs are pretty good at that and that's why they call us 'Chooks' [fowl], scratch around knocking stuff off all over the place, and all that sort of stuff. Historically proven fact going back.

23:00 **Why are they?**

It's an historically proven fact back to the Boer War and First World War, the Signals they'd scratch anything up and they'd produce anything. They were pretty good at knocking stuff off. In regards to the mail, well, we kept it very quiet that we'd have diggers all over the country, one-man, two-man

23:30 radio detachments on a border crossing in Laos, or Vietnamese border or Thai border or provincial headquarters throughout the country, they're paying rent and I'm talking substantial amounts. Like you'd have someone down on the coast and they're paying 35 to 40 thousand dollars a month rent on a two-storey villa.

24:00 That was common, commonplace until more infrastructure come into place as far as billeting, new buildings being built.

**So this is your blokes living in rented accommodation?**

Yeah.

**Is that what you were organising back here?**

Not so much the rent part, of delivering the rent in the mail. There's another story. I lost US\$30,000 once, in the early days

24:30 when I kept being assured by the Regimental Officer, "Just chuck it on the aircraft, it'll find its way there." Well this particular bag didn't. It turned up six months later in some miniscule French air base.

**How did they react to it going missing?**

They just took it.

**How did you react?**

I should have sent it home, but I didn't. I just say, this is one of the reasons why

25:00 I pestered and got my own dedicated aircraft. I walked away with a big smile on my face. It took me quite a while to get my own dedicated aircraft; it just wasn't working.

**Before you went to Cambodia, how did your family react to leaving?**

Not too good. A lot of reservations there from my wife and kids. They had heard all sorts of stories over there.

**What sort of things were they worried about?**

25:30 Me in particular getting hurt, or whatever. Being away from home for so long. Twelve months is a long time. Even though I got back after the first six months for a week – that was great, we went camping – they had a lot of reservations about me going. Lorraine's very supportive, while at the time having a lot of reservations.

26:00 It was a little bit uncomfortable to a certain degree.

**Was it difficult for you resolving that?**

But how can you? You don't. All you can do is reassure her that I'll be right.

**Were you excited about it?**

Pretty keyed up about it yeah. Pretty well looking forward to it.

26:30 **What did you have to do personally to prepare?**

Wills, banking arrangements I suppose, a lot of banking details more than anything, I arranged to have –

27:00 forgotten it now – power of attorney, little things like that.

**Did you do any training in the culture?**

Yeah we had language orientation type stuff leading up to the actual deployment, this went on for months and months and months. We'd hear all sorts of news reports, it's off, it's on, it's off, it's on.

27:30 Really the only reason that the Australians got the nod over the French military was because Australia only procured the only radio equipment, which was state-of-art at the time. That was the only reason the Australians got the nod ahead of the French, not because of Gareth Evans, because our technology was way ahead, the type of radio equipment that was procured.

**Did you think Gareth Evans was right in what he was saying?**

Oh he was 100% right,

28:00 no one else was prepared to go in and have a crack at it. When you think that it's regionally affecting Australia.

**What did you feel about the peace process generally? Was it important for Australia to be there?**

Yes. I think so. This was the opposite to Vietnam. In this situation we're not there to throw rocks at each other, we were there to stop throwing rocks and be careful where you stand.

28:30 Basically I think we did a damned good job all up.

**What did you learn about the local people that you were going to?**

We did several weeks of indoctrination as far as the language, we picked up a bit of the lingo before we left and picked up more while we were in the country. Just enough to get you through.

29:00 A little bit about the culture, but that was spasmodic. As far as what faction you were talking about you wouldn't have a clue. Generally we didn't get that much about the people, mainly about the terrain more than anything. I was surprised when I hit the country, because it was a dust bowl, I thought it was just jungle, but no. Big lake in the middle and it was a dust bowl in the dry season.

29:30 **How did you come to leave Australia?**

We left Tullamarine in a British 747; there was 500 of us all up, in two flights. Mickey Mouse here [I] had the you-beaut honour of keeping the roll, so I wasn't real impressed about that, keeping tabs on everyone. Don't know how I scored that job.

30:00 When we got to Bangkok I had 500 guns in my hotel room so I got landed with that as well, so I don't know how I scored that.

**Why did you get that job?**

I don't know. I don't know, wrong place and the wrong time. They thought I was responsible enough or

stupid enough to take it on, so, "Here's your nominal roll of everyone, put them on their chalks [allocate them to aircraft]. When you get to Bangkok,

30:30 here's your hotel, billet them and by the way here's all the weapons that you've got to put through Customs." I was a bit anxious at the time because the first contingent that went over about two months prior had all their weapons confiscated at Bangkok International Airport, so that caused an international problem. I was a bit anxious when I was putting 500 through instead of 30, they ended up in

31:00 my hotel room.

**Was there any problem in customs?**

No. Didn't even tell them what was in the box.

**Was there much media around when you were leaving the country?**

A little bit at Watsonia, but not much. We had a bit of a morning tea with wives and relatives because we were all in our civilians at Tullamarine when we got off the bus there was a bit there. We had the

31:30 day before at Springvale and the Cambodian community put on a big luncheon for us and I don't know, I got stuck with the media again. I was interviewed for a while. Like I said, the Cambodian community put a big lunch on, we all said to ourselves, "Are we going to eat this crap or what?" It wasn't very pleasing to the palate but we got used to it.

**What were you interviewed about?**

32:00 "What are you going to do?" "Where do you come from?" "What do you expect to get over there, when you get over there?"

**When you look back at that interview, what do you think about, what were you saying at that point?**

I thought I was answering rhetoric questions. I was just following the bouncing ball, might be the wrong word to use rhetoric

32:30 but I thought it was at the time.

**What happened when you got to Hong Kong?**

Bangkok.

**Sorry Bangkok.**

We met the New Zealanders over there because there was about 50 of them. In fact, two of us got stuck with the weapons at Taipan International Hotel,

33:00 two of us were stuck with all the weapons and everyone else was into town. I wasn't happy about that because we didn't get in until one o'clock in the morning and had breakfast from two o'clock onwards. Basically the poor bunny here is stuck with all 500 guns, went through Customs, didn't even ask what was in the box, in the hotel room and flew to Cambodia on a 727 held

33:30 together by red back spiders, like 'Air Vietnam'. We had four flights of them. It was a bit scary because once they started the engines up and the air conditioning kicked in, it fogged the whole cabin and the whole plane. We're going, "We're flying to Cambodia in this?" We weren't happy about it, plus we had to fly...because of the air restrictions, we had to fly across Cambodia through

34:00 Ho Chi Minh City and then come in the back way to Phnom Penh, air restrictions flying out of the jungle.

**How many guys were with you?**

Where?

**How many guys did you have attached to your specific**

Courier system?

**Mmm, on that initial flight?**

I already had three in the country for three months, they'd started a small courier system

34:30 on the then headquarters, which soon moved to the Cambodia Conference Centre or the Parliament or whatever, already three drivers in situ. I had 45 drivers or corporals and a sergeant under me and

35:00 20 of those drivers went out country, mainly to sector headquarters, and the rest stayed in Phnom Penh for the courier system, so all up about 45 under me.

**What was worrying about what would happen when you got there?**

Well there was no infrastructure when we got there.

- 35:30 It was ad hoc, we're trying to get mail, rations or whatever to all our diggers out there, already out there, when they started to move out country and right around the whole country. I thought, "How in the hell am I going to get all this stuff delivered to each digger?" and that's where I had the big conflict between me and our regimental officer. I had a big problem with him
- 36:00 right from the word go until we come home. There was a "them" and "us" syndrome between the rest of the Australian contingent. They were living in their air-conditioned villa, cooks, maids, need I say more. Anyway, it took me two months to get my own dedicated aircraft. How I did that apart from negotiations between myself, air movements and a Turkish colonel. He was
- 36:30 very helpful, I'll never forget his name Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Hiskandale, a retired Turkish colonel, perfect English, he was very helpful, but his hands were tied. There were so many aircraft in the country; they were all ex-Russian MI-17s. The first two months was chaos, completely. We'd tag bags of mail and when they get there you don't know.
- 37:00 Nothing was accountable at that point of time until I had a registered mail system organised a safe and all that sort of stuff. I was banging my head against the wall for a couple of months saying to my regimental officer, "Where's my dedicated aircraft? I can't do this without it?" They kept saying, "Just chuck it on the aircraft she'll be right."
- 37:30 General Sanderson used to work just above our heads when we were in headquarters and he used to come down every morning at 10 o'clock and have a cup of coffee with some "real humans" as he'd say, and I'd spill me guts. Next day I got a pat on me back from one of the people in the regimental office, "Smoky, I got your dedicated aircraft," I said, "Wow! Is that right."

**What did you say to him when he came down?**

I spat the dummy.

- 38:00 I had just started an operational map, as far as grids, I had my OC who was very clued up he had a programme for plotting time and movement plots for aircraft; he came up with a timetable for me. I gave him the location, because I'd already been around the country that many times, I bought a survey fellow and he plotted by GPS [Global Positioning System] and we had them converted to grid references so
- 38:30 we'd know exactly where our people were on the ground. Because all the individual one-man radios were at large or very small border crossings for all the refugees, there were about three million between Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. By the time I got my own dedicated aircraft up and running with our own people manning the aircraft, I was near the six-month mark.

- 39:00 You can imagine the chaos and the abuse I got from my own people. So, I got used to it after a while, "Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir," I didn't worry about it after that.

**What was the worst experience of that you had?**

In what way? Being berated in front of your own men. We had this one particular major, he was

- 39:30 from South Africa, he couldn't join the Australian Army so he went to England and joined the British Army and went through the Australian Army through the back door. He had a maniacal attitude, he was schizophrenic and he got moved away for his own good and safety. He got sorted out.

**What sort of things would he do?**

Call you a liar, "Show me where all the individual units

- 40:00 or UN buildings or institutions where you've got to deliver mail." "I haven't got a clue. You wouldn't let me come here three weeks ago to start the system." "You're a bloody liar, blah blah, blah," right in front of my men. He was moved very quickly after that. You hear all sorts of stories about officers being mysteriously shot in the back of the neck on the battlefield.

**40:30 Tempting?**

Oh yes. I didn't have to but once we got the system in place and I had the dedicated aircraft so each day, six days a week, we had a north sector and a south sector, each sector was basically circumnavigating Victoria, it would take eight hours and ten minutes to do one tour,

- 41:00 that's flying time. That's the north sector and south sector and like I said it's eight hours flying time and we were in the aircraft for 10 hours a day. With that as I mentioned before about the amount of money we were moving, rations, I had a registered mail system.

- 41:30 I had a huge safe procured and it was put in my office so overnight the money could be left in an envelope, sealed, in the safe. The next morning it's taken out and put in the brief case with all our hand held radio equipment because we'd contact people as we were going to land. I had a registered mail system, so every time I received registered mail they'd come back with their receipt and I'd just cross it

out.

## Tape 5

- 00:34 Anyway, the system I had in place, registered mail system, that included virtually money, they sent thousands and thousands of dollars around the country, just basically for rations and paying for spending money or whatever or pay
- 01:00 diggers pay they'd send up country for spending if you can get anywhere to spend it, but mainly for rent and buying meals and rations. It was pretty hard to send fresh rations to somewhere we don't even know exactly where it is. I may, but Regimental Ops, no. So this registered mail system was absolutely foolproof. I did however in the early days lose US\$50,000, which
- 01:30 conveniently turned up about six months later, so it was a bit worse for wear a bit of water damage whatever to the actual mail and contents. I gleefully returned it to Regimental Ops and gave it to them. "This is why I needed my dedicated aircraft three or four months ago." So they went "Oh?" "So I don't know what's in the bag you can do what you want with it." Anyway.
- 02:00 **Were there any repercussions when you lost that money?**
- No. Not even an investigation. You'll probably find out later that all this money that they were throwing around was not accountable. They were in a sense wherever they got the money from because they first contingent went over with suitcases full of money
- 02:30 in US dollars and basically to get themselves set up because there is no infrastructure obviously. So you had to buy people off, buy off interpreters, buy cars off the black market if you have to, buy rental properties for rent to pay for rent to actually get some form of infrastructure of 30-odd people. As far as the money flying around the country, well if there's
- 03:00 no investigation obviously there is no accountability for some of this money. That was the main reason that I had a foolproof registered system for the mail. If I didn't get a reply back within 48 hours, I'd ring up Australian Military Police and they'd go and chase them up and their report would go to the CO. They have to answer to the CO why they didn't return this registered mail within 48 hours. So, I ensure that
- 03:30 happened, because I got sick and tired of getting my arse kicked.
- How surprised were you by the unaccountability for the money?**
- Common knowledge. Like there was our Regimental Ops in their own little world and the rest of the Australian contingent. It was very untidy and very uncomfortable, there was a lot of resentment for the whole time we were there and it wasn't until we had a new CO
- 04:00 turnover that the CO actually moved into the billeting with RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], CO except for the Ops.
- When you say there was a lot of resentment who?**
- Just talk between the diggers. It's "them" and "us." They also procured another French villa, it had a huge big swimming pool, beautiful gardens
- 04:30 and they were paying 30, 40, 50 thousand a month for these four people. It was originally procured for R&R for diggers to come back from up country, spend a few days in town and then go back up country, but the residents including the chaplain used to complain about their noise, so they stopped diggers from coming into the villa. So that was a bit untidy.
- Chris, just going back to when you first went to Cambodia, can you describe the weapons that you were carrying?**
- 05:00 Steyrs, Minimis, that was basically it, MAG-58s, which is a Belgian version of an M-60, that's about it.
- You had about 500 of those.**
- 500 Steyrs.
- And there were no questions asked at customs?**
- No. I was surprised. Especially when they ended up in my hotel room.
- 05:30 As I said two or three months prior to that when the first, I forget which nomenclature what name they went by, UNAMIC [UN Advanced Mission in Cambodia], I can't remember, we were UNTAC [United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia]. They had all their weapons confiscated at customs; that caused a bit of an international furore or an incident. No questions asked. I was in charge of the weapons, went through the rollers, through customs no questions asked,

06:00 onto the bus and to the hotel.

**Why were you in charge of the weapons?**

Wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe I had the nominal roll, so to speak, ticking everyone off and putting them into particular hotel rooms and liaising with the hotel manager and getting them up there and telling them to make sure they get back here, otherwise you're in a heap of poop, by a certain time.

06:30 **So you were surprised when you ended up at the hotel with 500 weapons or more.**

There were more. It was just luck of the draw I guess. Everyone else, me and another sergeant stayed with the weapons and the whole Australian contingent, whether they went to bed or hit the town, most of them hit the town. I don't know what part of town, I don't want to know.

07:00 **Can you describe your very first impressions of Cambodia?**

Goddamn hot. As soon as that door opened and hit the tarmac, bloody hot. On the back of trucks, it was only a three kilometre drive to our compound and it's another three kilometres into town, even driving from the airport sitting on top of our bags as we looked around the place we said, "Where's the jungle?"

07:30 So that was April the start of the dry season and it was as dry as a bone and it stank. Devastation everywhere, no cars, just a few pushbikes, mainly pushbikes and a couple of motorcycles. It soon changed in the next month or two.

**What sort of devastation?**

Just no buildings standing. You'd

08:00 see a lot of building going on because, like I said, the airport is only two or three kilometres from our area, well basically Australian headquarters for the Australian contingent, which happened to be an extermination centre. Upstairs and downstairs, a lot of clean up when we first hit the deck.

08:30 **Can you describe that?**

Dried blood, excrement, we had to scrape it off all the walls and floors because we had a two storey-building as well; it ended up being our headquarters. There was one barrack block standing and that was it, just a single storey block for 50-odd people.

**How did you know it had been an extermination centre?**

We were told

09:00 by our advance party, because they had already started the clean up and everything was white washed, but it was yellow. Once you get blood and excrement staining that, you don't get it out. All you can do is paint over it. The white and yellow tiles were stained. You know what it is, you don't have to be Einstein to work out what it is. The stench,

09:30 if you like a nice roast pork on the Weber [brand of kettle barbecue] you'll no exactly what I mean. Sorry to put you off your roast pork for the rest of your life, but that's what it smells like.

**I think you have actually. What did you think about having to do that?**

We had to do something. The first 50 of us were reasonably lucky, they knew who was going to be staying in Phnom Penh,

10:00 so they went into the permanent barracks, no windows, no doors, no nothing just a room for five or six people. Put your stretcher, our mozzie net and that was it. The rest were in tentage and for the first three months, two months actually, one of the squadrons actually lived in tents and under a bit of a lean to, an old shed. They had to live with the rats and

10:30 ground crawlers for the first two months. Basically all you're sleeping on is pallets and you've got all the low life creeping around, all night. Second day I was there, I had my mozzie net soaked in Baygon [brand of insecticide], a pretty strong mix of Baygon and hang it out to dry and

11:00 the next night I had a scorpion about six or seven inches long and a centipede about a foot long stuck up on the mozzie net. I was very religious in tucking my mozzie net under my little mattress every night and every morning. On top of that, you have fresh water walking fish, which are closely related to stonefish. Bit of a zip, they're walking fish.

11:30 **Those fish that you're talking about are they poisonous?**

Vaguely related to a stonefish. You could walk on them with bare feet and they'll give you a bit of a zap but that's about all you'll get. They're only about four or five inches long and they actually walk around on their front.

**On land?**

On land, yeah.

**But they're fish.**

They're fish.

12:00 And they breathe air.

**Where do you encounter them?**

In our barracks, in our rooms nearly every night. Just kick them out the door and they'll be back next night because we had a big swamp just behind us and obviously that's where they come from. You never walk around the place in bare feet.

**How did the conditions compare with what you expected?**

12:30 Firstly I was expecting to be sleeping on a stretcher under the stars or under a tent at least. We were still in the throes of the end of the wet season so we were getting some pretty good drops of rain still, even though the local countryside was starting to dry up pretty quickly. What was the question again?

**How did the reality of the conditions that you were living in compare with what you had expected?**

13:00 Well I was expecting to sleep in the hootchie [improvised shelter] in a stretcher that was it. There was a leaking roof, a billeted barracks used to be, I was to learn later that it was an actual military driving school. So in that regard we were pretty lucky for those that got the billeted area.

13:30 The rest were in tents, stinking hot, any sort of ground crawler you could think of; the rest were under a shed, they had rats as big as cats. We dug some, a whole series of shit pits, ablutions, just a big hole in the ground with toilet seats over the top and you had to make sure you brought your water bottle with you so you could wet down the seat otherwise

14:00 you'd stick to it, because there was no shade for the toilets. Very awesome looking things because you could hear things rattling around underneath you, you don't know what they were, I believe they were large rats. You know, the first month everybody had Montezuma's revenge [diarrhoea], so it doesn't matter how purified the water was you're going to get the runs.

14:30 I'd lost a stone in the first month. You try and plug yourself up with local, fresh bread and rice but once you try something solid, out it comes again.

**That was caused by what?**

Just the bug in the water. Doesn't matter how much, it's just the change of water. If you move from anywhere in Australia you may drink water, say Mackay or Bundaberg, you drink their water and you get the runs. It's just the change

15:00 of water. We had our own water purification units, doesn't matter how much chlorine they put in it or whatever, it just goes straight through you. That was a bit of a problem for the lot of us.

**What other health problems were there?**

I got, me in particular, I got several occasions got bad cases of impetigo, which is scratching mozzie bites of a night and that's tropical ulcers or

15:30 severe cases of school sores I think it's basically the same as school sores, impetigo.

**What was that like?**

Oh, half my leg fell off. Rotting, stinking ulcers. One was about the size of a saucer, just by scratching a

16:00 mozzie bite in your sleep, just that bacterial fungus on your skin, really pussie and scaly, not very nice.

**Was it painful?**

Yes. To a degree.

**How was that treated?**

By washing them daily, different methods, I suppose Condly's Crystals, antiseptic, Mercurochrome, antibiotics.

16:30 You had a steady stream of people going to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and burns, forgetting to take your water bottle to the toilet; your bum would stick to the black seat. A few cases of bad burns.

**Did you ever experience that?**

No. I took my water bottle.

**So from just sitting on the toilet seat they were burnt?**

Yeah. Just the heat.



17:00 You're in I think was 52 degrees Celsius on the tarmac, 100% humidity, so pretty extreme sort of temperatures. Generally in the hot season you're looking at 40, 45, get a bit of rain, she'll drop down to 35, 30. So we got there at pretty extreme start of the season just on the end of the wet and the start of the dry.

17:30 **What sort of protection did you have against the heat?**

You wore a hat, sleeves are down, generally try and stay indoors if you could. It's all right for us, we were in the UN headquarters, as far as I was concerned, the UN headquarters or in a vehicle. So I didn't spend too much time out in the sun.

**When you first arrived at the airport, what was the condition of the airport?**

Not too bad. It was

18:00 big enough; a bit bumpy on the 727 to land and a bit bumpy taking off too, just quietly. Reasonable condition. The air traffic control tower was there to a degree; it was only a matter of months before it was all Mickey Mouse and fresh looking. UN spent a fair bit of money on it from

18:30 scratch.

**What was the actual situation in terms of what was happening there politically when you arrived?**

They were faction fighting when we arrived. You had the Khmer Rouge was the main lynch pin, the KPL&F, People's Front, National Front, the police -

19:00 they were a law unto their own anyway. The military you didn't know which way they were leaning, you had five to six different factions still throwing rocks at each other. That's when we hit the country. Basically we were on red card by the time we landed at the airport, which is the highest rules of engagement.

**What does that actually mean?**

19:30 You're at the loaded condition, there is no round in the spout [chamber] but you've got a full magazine on. If anyone acts defensively or looks like he's aiming something at you, you can take him out. That's the end of story. If you think he's pointing something at you or you think he's going to shoot you.

20:00 **Regardless of...**

Who he is.

**Who it was?**

Because you don't know who they are. In fact we had a, I don't know whether it's true or not, but we had a bounty of \$500 on our heads from the Khmer Rouge. Take that with a grain of salt. Whether that was true or not, seemed pretty real to us.

**We as in any of the UN peacekeepers?**

No. Just us.

20:30 They knew that we'd go chasing them if they shot at us. They knew we'd go after them.

**When you say us?**

The Australians.

**Who did you hear that from?**

It happened. So they knew our rules of engagement and they knew we'd go after them, which happened. Like one of my drivers got a commendation for returning fire.

21:00 And especially up country you knew you were pretty safe because even though you were in Indian country as far as we were concerned, you know, like I said take it with a grain of salt but that's how you sort of hear things, it was in the local media that they'd put a bounty on any of our heads. So you know,

21:30 basically they said just be careful, don't ever go anywhere on your own, always in twos and threes, but once it started getting closer to the elections any time you left our compound you were armed.

**What were your thoughts about having a bounty on your head?**

Not a great deal. Probably all blowing smoke out of their arse, I don't know. I don't know.

**Were you concerned about it at all?**

No.

22:00 Just basically common sense, don't go wandering around on your own anywhere. Always go in pairs or a group, which we did religiously.

**You said that when you first arrived and headed out to the barracks there was a lot of devastation. Were there people around?**

A few, mainly building and making do with whatever is available. The Cambodians have probably the best

22:30 bricks and mortars in the world, they are only slightly smaller in dimension, they're rock hard these bricks and the concrete is brilliant stuff. They can build a two-storey building in a day. A lot of building going on. I'm not saying there was rifle fire, smoke and pestilence and all that sort of stuff, it looked very untidy though.

**What about ordinary civilians, did you observe them?**

23:00 Yeah.

**What were they doing?**

Just going on about survival, making some form of survival like I said there was no infrastructure, there was no power, no sewage, sewage canals on both sides of the main road from the airport, pretty untidy, the smell. Obviously things gradually improved as we went along, but just first impression, it

23:30 was damned hot and just looking at the people as you're driving along and they don't look too happy. Once you get up country like I did and many of the others, you could really see they'd been through an awful lot, especially when you're driving along to Kompongkleang. It's about a two hour drive from Phnom Penh north and the

24:00 whole dirt road, 50 kilometres, is lined with beggars.

**When you say you were on that initial arrival, you said they didn't look too happy. What made you think that?**

Well, they weren't doing cartwheels or smiling a lot.

**What were they doing?**

Just going along scratching for a living I suppose. You'd have some enterprising woman

24:30 probably half the age she actually looks, she may start up a little gasoline station with coke bottles full of petrol and you'd see a lot of them. Little things like that. Roadside stalls, just scratching a living, apart from little buildings going up and shanties. But when you got closer, my first exposure to the city itself was completely different

25:00 story whatsoever because it was chaos.

**Can you tell us about that?**

Still a lot of building going on, a lot of rubbish still left lying around, sewage everywhere, very few motorcycles, virtually two or three cars in the whole city and they were taxis. It was pretty cheap in the first couple of days because I'd grab a taxi and get a quick look around five bucks for the whole day.

25:30 So they were the sort of charges they were charging you. A lot of cyclos [motorised bicycles]. Within a month, I guess there would be thousands of cars and thousands of motorcycles, all smuggled in from Thailand or Vietnam or wherever.

**In what sense was it chaos?**

Nothing, the streets were virtually bare, a lot of rubbish and crap lying around, yes, there were building repairs going on

26:00 and that's incessant, night and day. So as I said, within a month or two, you'd see buildings going up, bamboo scaffolding going up and stuff like that. It's sort of a no-go zone for a few weeks until we got to know our way around.

**In relation to the actual faction fighting what was your briefing how to deal with that?**

Just try to

26:30 identify who's who. We knew who the leaders were, Hung Sen, I think his name is; he was, although he'll deny it, he was the lieutenant in the Khmer Rouge and here he is the Prime Minister under Prince Sihanouk. Hung Sen yeah that's him. I think he's still one

27:00 of the leaders in a coalition government in Cambodia. He was one of Pol Pot's [former leader of the Khmer Rouge] lieutenants. He still resided in the Khmer Rouge compound, not far from the old US [United States] Consulate, which had been burnt and gutted out. He used to reside in the Khmer Rouge compound. Later I learnt that he was living on the

27:30 floating hotel, which was a big old ocean liner with all, this things Mickey Mouse; it only arrived about a few weeks after we got there. So a lot of enterprising people were about, a lot of Thais, a lot of

Vietnamese and a lot of Australians, businessmen.

### **What were the Australian businessmen doing?**

Setting up; one was a New Zealander, he got the catering contract for the UN.

- 28:00 He was the one who got knocked on the head in Somalia – the New Zealand catering contractor, forget his name. Just to be specific, there was a small supermarket set up, there was a lot of black market, most of it was, everything was black market. Glass works, a few Australian entrepreneurs started moving in, the glass
- 28:30 works. There was a brewery; I think Fosters was moving in. I'm just trying to think of specifics, but on the military side of things, you had engineers and a Chinese engineering battalion that basically were road works. You had
- 29:00 a Polish logistic battalion, which mainly looked after stores and warehouses. As far as I can use one specific, because I nearly ran over about half a dozen locals when I did a U-turn, I saw a VB [Victoria Bitter] shop and we hadn't had an Australian beer for months and I did a Rodney Rude [Australian comedian, crude style] and I pivoted and he sold
- 29:30 nothing but cans of VB. After scuttling about half a dozen locals and their push bikes and cyclos, I walked up this little fellow, he was like a local gin we used to call the locals and said, "Where did you come from?" He said, "Springvale, mate"; he was a local from Springvale in Melbourne. He was a bit of an entrepreneur; he'd spent all his life savings,
- 30:00 bought all this duty free beer, there's no import taxes and he's selling cartons of VB for US\$14 a carton. Of course, I had to load my Land Rover up and I took it back and put it on ice and gave everybody a nice surprise later on that night. Just to use an example of people taking advantage of the situation.

### **What was the response from your troops that night?**

I was

- 30:30 the toast of the year. I didn't tell them where I got it from. For a couple of days, the mess was a pretty happy little place. We had only just built our own little mess as a watering hole for the mess and I had a very good response out of that, considering we'd been drinking Steinlager, I think it's from New Zealand, and Becks and
- 31:00 German beer and Tiger beer [Malaysian]. We hadn't had any Australian beer for months.

### **So he stayed selling his beer?**

Yeah, he made a fortune. They used to bring container loads of cartons of VB from Melbourne, I don't know how the hell he got them there, but he got them there. So he did very well for himself apparently.

### **How many peacekeeping forces were there in Cambodia when you were there?**

- 31:30 As far as my recollection was 32,000. I wouldn't be able to remember all, but the main ones were Australian contingent, Ghana battalion – all they did was beat drums, play music and have a good time. Indonesian battalion, they were just – all they did was sort a bit of mail and baby sat hundreds of the Land Rovers, Land Cruisers.
- 32:00 You had the South American, Uruguay battalion, which did security, Polish battalion I spoke about, they're the main elements. You had a large French contingent, a few foreign Legionnaires and their aircraft, helicopters.
- 32:30 So there was over 50,000 people from outside, but 32,000 were military as far as I'm aware.

### **How much contact did you have with blokes from other nationalities?**

Canadians they were just up the road from us and we got on pretty well with them until the French changeover turned up, French-Canadian were very arrogant, they were just like the French. We didn't get on very well with them. That's another story.

- 33:00 The English Canadians are brilliant. They'd do anything for you and we'd do anything for them. But the French speaking Canadians were very arrogant just like their French motherland counterparts are concerned. Got on very well with them. Chinese, yeah, we tried to make contact with them but they wouldn't, they'd nod and smile and that was about it. The Polish were pretty good. Ugandans were hopeless: all they wanted to do was beat drums and have a good time.
- 33:30 Met a lot of the other contingents, we had on the Olympic Games Opening Day we had our own Olympics. The UN had it's own Atlanta Olympics Game Opening and we held our own Olympics.

### **Can you tell us about that?**

Our RSM, Barry Martin, he basically orchestrated it. It was held on the same day as opening day in Atlanta.

34:00 Basically he had several thousand, I think there was close to five thousand people attended in the grandstands, competitors, tug-o-war and high jump, skinny black fellows – I think they came from Kenya – they won all the distance races and the girl that ran the lap of the Atlanta games, the little Cambodian

34:30 athlete, her sister carried the torch at our opening day and she's supposed to be an athlete as well.

**What was she doing in Cambodia?**

No idea, just a local with our little flame that she carried around. I don't know about that. Just took a few photos and videos and everybody had a wow of a time.

35:00 **How did the local Cambodians enjoy it?**

They reckoned it was the best thing since canned beer. They had a ball sitting in the grandstand having a bit of a look.

**Did you participate at all?**

No, I was too busy having cold lemonades.

**So was that a bit of a social highlight?**

That didn't happen until, I forget when it happened now, but things were a bit on the relaxed side of things.

35:30 It was only held over the one day, poured down rain the day before so you can imagine what the athletics track was like, it was like a bog and they were trying to do a five thousand metre run. Everyone had a ball. The Ugandans are up in the grandstands with the drums and whistles and sirens. I've got it on tape to show you anyway.

**So getting back to those early days, can you tell us about what you observed of those different factions?**

36:00 First hand I think I was best qualified to do that because I think I met all of them including a soldier just outside Ho Chi Minh City ventured over the border because we were fog bound and ended up in Ho Chi Minh City and the UN

36:30 received several rockets [threats/complaints] the next day, "The next time you come over here, we'll shoot you down." All the questions, "Who was it?" "Wasn't me." "No, no." A lot of stories there. Khmer Rouge easily identifiable, other factions were virtually friendly to the peace process but it was

37:00 all in-house fighting.

**You mentioned the police force.**

Yeah they were a bit of an unknown. I think they were aligned with the KPL&F, National Front and then you've got the People's Front, you know, scary stuff and what's what. One of my predecessors actually blew one away in

37:30 our compound because he was running through with an AK-47 and he quickly dispatched seven rounds into him. That's how we know what a Steyr can do to turn a human being body into a piece of jelly.

**What were the circumstances of that?**

Apparently there was a policeman chasing a bad guy, he's running through our compound, he aimed his weapon at the machine gun pit, at the guardhouse,

38:00 because we had several different defensive areas, manned with a machine gun MAG-58s, but he opened up with his Steyr and he aimed his AK-47 at him, so he blew him away. That's just an example, you don't know about the police. Every full moon everybody gets their AK-47s out and tries to shoot the moon because they're superstitious. All you'd

38:30 see on a full moon is tracer gun fire going off, you don't know if it's friend or foe, it's just superstitious.

**Everyone as in who?**

Whoever can lay their hands on an AK-47 I suppose. It's scary stuff. You always stand under a nice big roof when they're doing that.

**Can you tell us about the first time you experienced that?**

I ducked.

**Had you been warned about that?**

Yeah. We retaliated,

39:00 maybe too many beers under our belt, we fired upon a policeman across the swamp because every time the moon came out he'd do that, so we got some you-beaut sky rockets from the markets and a big poly pipe and we shot him with a sky rocket. So everyone ducks for cover. It didn't hit him but it came bloody

close. That's some of the particular things

39:30 you'd get up to sometimes. We were warned about make sure you're standing under something solid when they're doing it.

**So what's the noise like when the full moon's out?**

Noisy, especially when you've got things falling down on tin roofs; that's why you've got to stand under something pretty solid.

**Are people injured?**

Oh I would presume so. Best advice is to stand under something solid when they're doing it.

40:00 **When you shot at the policeman, what was the intention?**

Just to shit stir him. Annoying us. We'd have a barrage of skyrockets hitting the mess and every time he'd do it we'd bring fire upon him with the launch of a skyrocket until he put his weapon away.

**Did he?**

Yep.

**Were all the different factions armed?**

40:30 Gosh yeah, to the teeth. It took a while to work out what uniform's what. The National Front and the People's Front they both had a Cambodian flag with a little emblem on the flag and they were supposed to be good guys. A lot of them were probably in it for ill-gotten gains or black market

41:00 or whatever, so you wouldn't really trust them too far. It's really hard to say, you're just trying not to associate with them, except when I had to a few times when I was scraping off a body off the ground.

## Tape 6

00:36 **Do you want to tell us a bit about the registered mail set up?**

With the system I put in place, it was basically just to cover our behinds. We'd have registered mail going all over the country and in addition to that I had a registered system where we'd have a duty driver after hours in the signal dispatch office

01:00 next room over from the communications centre. If we'd get a flash signal, for example, for a cease fire violation, you had to get it dispatched immediately to the duty officer who'd obviously notify someone, but a lot of occasions whether it would be a Pakistani or Indian or whatever nationality he was an officer, a lot of occasions he wouldn't bother passing it on. We'd be the first people that they'd come looking

01:30 for, "Why didn't you deliver it?" and all this sort of stuff, "I had a signature here at such and such a time this morning. I received a signature for that flash signal at whatever time." We used to cover our behinds because a lot of times that happened.

**What exactly is a flash signal?**

It's an immediate delivery, you have different priorities. You have routine, you have immediate,

02:00 you have priority signals, and you have immediate and flash signals. Priorities may have one to two hours by the time your next schedule run or if it can't be met it gets delivered immediately. The flash signals are to be delivered as soon as humanly possible. We'd do that; we'd jump on a motorcycle,

02:30 deliver it to the duty officer whatever time of the night it may be and we'd get a signature and a receipt for that particular message. It could be life threatening for all we know. So that happened quite often where the duty officer didn't bother passing it on.

**So in a peacekeeping situation, what would be some of the kind of flash signals they'd get?**

Cease-fire violations for example, medivacs,

03:00 any type of situation where it would require a flash signal which happened quite often. Maybe a downed aircraft, someone's run over a mine or someone requires medivac ASAP [as soon as possible] things like that. Unfortunately a lot of situations some of these officers used it in a blasé method of handling

03:30 that sort of very important information, that may go as high as the military commander which is General Sanderson or Kurosaki, Deputy what is he, trying to think of the right word, Deputy President of the UN I presume.

**What were the UN like to deal with as opposed to other army?**

04:00 Bureaucratic. Extremely bureaucratic. Very difficult sometimes to deal with, they'd have their own methodology to go about things, normally I wouldn't have that much trouble because obviously I'm in the limelight all the time, I'm up front waving the Australian flag because we're high profile in this regard, so

04:30 anything that got too messy I'd pass it on higher where they can sort them out.

**When you said you travelled around to different places, what were doing?**

I flew the majority of the time with my own crew and dedicated aircraft, which is normally a Russian MI-17.

**Can you describe the MI-17?**

A Black Hawk size.

05:00 Very smelly, very noisy, very rattly, but they seemed to stay in the air on occasion.

**How many people would it hold?**

It can carry 20 people. They're a good load-carrying machine. As far as getting around the country, I had to physically fly around to every border crossing where we had UN representatives or UNMOs, United Nations Military Officers.

05:30 Could be well one-man radio detachment, detached to an UNMO on a border crossing Thailand, Laos, Vietnam. Obviously, I had to locate them all and brought along one of our survey people to plot all the positions by GPS, translated them into grid references, so I could find them on the road or by GPS. It

06:00 turned out to be about 135 locations throughout the country, that includes sector, provincial and individual locations around and throughout Cambodia. One in Laos in Vientiane and one in Ho Chi Minh City where it was basically a liaison, a radio liaison with the UN.

**What was Laos like?**

Very jungley, hilly, very

06:30 nice people. In the north east of the country up near the Laos-Vietnamese-Cambodian border there is a, I suppose you'd still call it Indian country, it's basically tribespeople; I think they call them Montagnards; they're still throwing, well the Vietnamese and Montagnards have been throwing rocks at each other for a couple of hundred years.

07:00 You probably recognise them in the old John Wayne movie The Green Berets; the fellows with the crossbows they're Montagnards. I spent some time with them.

**Tell us a bit more about that, why did you come to have time with them?**

Unplanned. Had some trouble with our aircraft and spent a couple of days in one little village. Well looked after, had somewhere to sleep,

07:30 plenty to eat and were entertained; it was quite good.

**What did the village look like?**

In the hills anything you see on National Geographic I guess. Nothing spectacular, just a lot of green stuff, hills, wet, misty, it sort of conjures up images of the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh trail during the Vietnam war, because that's the kick off point

08:00 around that area and that linked up with Mekong River and down to the Delta.

**Were you worried that there was something wrong with the aircraft?**

Well it happened a couple of times. The only thing that freaked me out was to find out later that it took gunfire; it put it out of service, only for a while, it picked up after a while. The only thing that ticked me off was that my people didn't even know that I was missing. That happened twice. I wasn't happy about that.

**For two days?**

Three days the first time and overnight the second time.

**So what happened when you got back then?**

I said, "I'm back." "Didn't even know you were gone." Oh well.

08:30 **Why do you think they...?**

Oh, just lack of communication

09:00 in the Communications Unit, even though it was logged down that I was gone such and such a time in the log book. I was picked up by an American Black Hawk. There are two of them in the country, they were gun ships armed to the teeth and basically their mission was cease-fire violations.

09:30 After getting to know the major and the captain, there were a few people with tropical shirts and sunglasses around their headquarters, you knew who they were, you don't have to be Einstein. They were looking for MIAs [missing in action] from the Vietnam War. That's from the horse's mouth.

**They told you about that?**

10:00 Yeah, because I got to know them, I used to drink with them and I'd done a few flights with them, unofficially and they'd just go up and down the border because they were doing a roaring trade in artefacts, Zippo lighters or dog tags [identification discs]. There was a bit of a black market to reproduce fake dog tags and the locals seemed to make a bit of a killing out of it.

**So this is twenty years later?**

Yeah, they're still picking up bones and trying to identify

10:30 missing in action Americans, MIAs.

**How many blokes did you run into that were involved in that?**

Just those two, but there was a whole headquarters for, it was actually called Cease-fire Investigations Unit, which was led by Americans. Two Black Hawk gunships, I laughed myself silly when he first told me their main mission is looking for MIAs.

11:00 Not so much prisoners or romanticising about prisoners of war over the border, this is basically looking for bones and just putting to bed the frustrations of families back in America.

**What sort of guys were they?**

Cowboys, for a major and a captain they didn't mind a drink.

11:30 **When you were in the village, when you first initially got to the village were you worried about approaching the locals.**

No. We already had one of our diggers there; he was a one-man radio det [detachment] and it was used also as a small border crossing for refugees and they were quite helpful with refugees as well. They'd guide them, send them along their way. They'd be very cautious with the Vietnamese, they

12:00 hate each other's guts. I was told where to walk and where not to walk. One was tigers the other was booby traps and mines.

**Did you ever see either of those?**

I saw plenty of booby traps and mines, but I didn't see any tigers. A few of our fellows had had unexpected nose-to-nose visits a couple of times around the country, especially up near the Thai border as well.

12:30 **Did the blokes that were on those one-man stations; was it a tough gig for them?**

Yeah you would say it was pretty taxing being a long way from even your own contingent. Generally it wasn't real hard, all you'd do is a couple of radio scheds [schedules] a days and the rest of the time was yours.

13:00 They made sure they were seen to be doing their job, but once you've made those scheds each day, virtually got nothing else to do, checking out the local countryside.

**Did you have to move them around as well?**

Sometimes when we had to do a rotation or fill a gap if he's crook, we'd have to bring someone in and replace him, but that

13:30 wasn't exactly broadcast to the rest of the units, because I've been on the mat a few times physically throwing out Pakistani and Indian colonels out of my aircraft, literally, they'd try and commandeer my aircraft. "No, you can't." I had to stand on the mat there a couple of times.

14:00 **What does that mean?**

At attention, explain your actions to the CO or higher.

**What were the Indian and Pakistani soldiers like?**

Arrogant. Just like the French. No, we didn't have much to do with them anyway. If he wanted to get home for happy hour back in Phnom Penh he'd say, "I'm going on this aircraft and it's going straight there," and I'd say, "No it's not, sunshine," so you'd shirt and tail him out of my aircraft and take off.

14:30 **Then they'd report you?**

Yes. I just got a slap on the wrist and, "Don't do it again."

**Did you have much power as the person in charge of that set-up? Were you bothered much?**

By the pilot or what?

**By people above you?**

No, not really, if they stepped over the mark, like if they jumped on, "Do you mind if I jump on? I need to get back to Phnom Penh."

15:00 "We won't be back until 6.30 tonight," and they'd say, "Fine," "If there's room you can jump on." When he starts to try and commandeer the aircraft "Nah, mate, nah. Take a walk." When it gets physical I just chuck them out. I had great pleasure in doing that sometimes because they were arrogant little buggers.

**What were some of the more disturbing things that you witnessed in the peacekeeping process?**

15:30 Apart from, you know, I'm not talking about screaming flames and smoke and death and pestilence in the aircraft, but it was put down twice. But I wasn't to know that we took rounds until a week later and then I started freaking out. That's why we used to sit on top of our flak jackets and our helmets when we were flying. We only had one incident where one of our colonels got shot in the hand, came up through the floorboards.

16:00 Don't know why he got a Distinguished Service Cross for that, but he was a colonel so he must be entitled to one, worse happened to diggers.

**Where were you that day?**

He was on my aircraft. He was just hitching a ride having a look around the countryside, I had no problems with that. He was an Australian colonel, Colonel Stewart.

**Were you on there that day?**

No, one of my corporals and one of my diggers,

16:30 just doing the normal mail run, service run.

**When you say had to be put down, couldn't you hear the gunfire?**

No. Hardly a day went past without seeing a hole in the rotor blade, that's why we used to sit on our flak jackets. So it didn't really bother you, these things may be held together by red backs, but they were reasonably reliable and usually stayed in the air.

17:00 On most occasions where in between drop offs it was not uncommon to fly around fifteen to seventeen thousand feet, out of harms way so to speak.

**So when did you feel most in physical danger?**

I walked through a couple of minefields, may have mentioned when I had the Montezuma's revenge, I filled

17:30 my boots and I was on the mat again, when I dropped the French UNMO [United Nations Military Officer], because of a night they pull the signs down, the minefield signs they pull them and are supposed to put them up in the morning for the bad guys. Well, they forgot to put them up, I landed in the rice paddy next to a little village, Christmas day, mail bag over my shoulder with a Santa Claus hat.

18:00 All the locals are waving frantically at me and I'm going, "Ho, ho, ho," and one of the fellows said, "Stop!" That's when I filled me boots. Anyway, got out of there in a hurry, didn't have to probe me way out because I could see where I'd come from. But that's one of the two occasions that I know of.

**When they said, "Stop," how did you end up getting out of the situation?**

I was told to stop by one of our

18:30 fellows, I was already half way through it.

**So what did you do?**

Shit myself.

**How did you get out of that?**

I could see where I'd come from so I just retraced my steps. That sort of situation you'd probably get on your guts and probe yourself out. I could clearly see where I'd come from, so back on to the path where everybody else is and went into the village and dropped him. I was on the mat again. You sort of get a little bit anxious when

19:00 something like that happens to you. He had his little girlfriend in his hut, his little lap-lap; I did a lap-lap



on his face. I wasn't happy.

**Did you see much in the way of cruelty to the local people?**

Yeah, to a degree. I saw a couple of murders in town in Phnom Penh. It was mainly due to break-ins, robbery.

- 19:30 Their justice is they get a 45 [pistol] out and in that regard another occasion one of my corporals and I, Dennis Baker, we were heading off to a Canadian PX [Post Exchange - canteen unit] like a military convenience store so to speak, the day before there was a big fire in this big shanty town, huge. And when
- 20:00 we came through the next day, something like a million and a half Vietnamese still in and around the community, anyway they're having land fights, claim jumping on plots of land after the fire went through. And we watched this crowd hack this fella to death with machetes in front of our vehicle. He had a hand grenade in his hand, a Chinese thing that had rusted to buggery. Anyway they
- 20:30 hacked him to pieces and one of the 'good guys' with the machetes threw this grenade into me chest, "You take, you take." "Piss off, piss off." Anyway took it off him and, I think Dennis, yeah still sitting in the vehicle by the time I got into the vehicle the fella had been dragged away. Interesting
- 21:00 to note the day before we had a truck load of lineys [linesmen] on their way to a job. They helped out with saving kids from the fire and they got quite a few commendations out of that. Anyway back to the grenade, I looked at the damned thing and the safety pin was hair thin and been rusted away, the river was right next to me, "Do I chuck her in or
- 21:30 put her in a safe place?" I've heard of spontaneous ignition on a grenade so I said, "I'm not going to chuck it," I'll lose a hand or something. So in the front compound is a big steel grate fence, stuck it in the middle of the floor and rang up UN Police, they have a bomb disposal unit and they come and picked her up. That was a bit exciting that day.

**22:00 What they'd taken the body of the man?**

They'd dragged him away. Did whatever they did. He was stuffed when we saw him, it was happening right in front of my Land Rover. I got blood all over me, I got AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] tested, blood tested and all that sort of stuff because I was covered in blood. I wasn't a happy little vegemite then. We still went to the PX store though.

**22:30 How much at that point did you think the peacekeeping force was working?**

As far as troops in country, they were only providing protection for the UN, no one else. It was right next door to the Ugandan infantry battalion and they're not going to come out, no way would they come out for that sort of thing, they're too busy banging their drums and

- 23:00 blowing their trumpets having a good time. Like I said, with most of the infantry battalions there from different nations, like the Uruguayan battalion in Stungtrang they were basically providing security for the actual township. The Dutch battalion up near Pailin, they just set up a fortress.
- 23:30 They were seen doing patrols and stuff? No, they weren't, they were just staying in their little log fortress and that's where they're staying put. That was Indian country with the Khmer Rouge around that way.

**What did you know of the Khmer Rouge?**

They weren't real friendly. We had very, very little to do with them except when I was going into Pailin myself and they'd nod at you and

- 24:00 smile at you and you'd do the same and keep going and you just carry on as though you don't have a care in the world.

**How could you distinguish them?**

See some factions wear the tea towels around their neck, some had blue, some had red. So you didn't know which is which. Khmer Rouge always wore a blue one I think, or a red one, can't remember now. That's how you could normally distinguish Khmer Rouge

- 24:30 from the normal Khmer. So just keep an eye on their tea towels, their checked tea towels.

**What did they look like?**

No different to any other Khmer. No different, they're all the same.

**Their uniform, what was that like?**

- 25:00 They had a drab green uniform, some wore hats some didn't, most had the scarf. The Khmer army they had the specific type dungarees or the greens, more well dressed than the Khmer Rouge. The regulars

25:30 from out west well we didn't really want to have anything to do with them anyway, except for our Australian contingent that was in there with them and they got on fine. No hassles. They knew we were armed too, so they'd leave us alone.

**Why did you have to go in there in the first place?**

Just liaising, say you may have a British commander

26:00 in, say, no, an actual squadron in Battambang, in Pailin you'd have a section, a communication centre, but you may be commanded by the British, could be French, could be whatever and you liaise with him. I'd put the new SOP out as far as timetables and all that sort of stuff, we'd have a call sign, we'd have a radio frequency on the UHF [Ultra High Frequency] handheld, and we'd liaise with

26:30 them as well as our people and say, "Well, this is when it's due, could be early could be late, preferably a bit late." If we were early, we'd just slow down a bit and get there on time so they know if you've got any mail to get it out and to the Australian who's going to waiting there at the helipad. So basically that was the liaising work was concerned. Still had to find them all, that was the difficult part. A lot of places you just couldn't,

27:00 you don't get in by road or it could be mined, who knows. There was a lot of mine going on. There was one in specific up at Kompongkleang, a New Zealand mine clearing team was going through and this French major said, "I'm going through." The New Zealanders said, "No. It's mined." He said, "I'm going through," and all they found was his right foot on the accelerator. There was an anti-personnel, anti-tank

27:30 and a 105 [millimetre] underneath it. They just put a nice little hole through the floor and through the roof. So just the arrogance of the French. That's all they found, his right foot and right boot on the accelerator pedal.

**What were the most volatile of the peacekeeping forces?**

Probably the Australians and the French Foreign Legion.

28:00 'Wild West movies', yes it happened. The bar room brawl, there was a couple of them. Apparently we did pretty well. We had some big boys with us too, you know. That's alcohol.

**What other stuff did the soldiers get up to in town?**

Those that had plenty of time up their sleeve got charged several times, young diggers,

28:30 taxi surfing.

**What does that involve?**

Standing on the bonnet and getting driven around town. They thought it was a blast. It was a chargeable offence to be taken around town on a taxi or motorbike because it's so damned dangerous.

**Why is that?**

29:00 Well, too much alcohol.

**It was a chargeable offence to ride in a taxi drunk?**

No. Stand on the bonnet and taxi surf. I don't know what got into them. A couple of them got charged over that and some of them bear scars to this day, stupid.

**What other stuff did they get up to in town? Was there much action in the brothels?**

29:30 Oh yeah. Yeah.

**Was there much of a problem with VD?**

I don't think that we heard much about VD, well I didn't, but I know for a fact that three or four senior soldiers are still in country because of AIDS. Senior soldiers I'm talking about. They told the wives, "I'm not coming home."

30:00 **By local women?**

Yeah. If they want to play by the rules, they'll die by the rules. I've got no sympathy for them. They're probably the ones that got away with blue bloody murder while we were in country anyway. We had an area of haves and have nots and people with plenty of time up their sleeves while the

30:30 minority of us were working our guts out. So tough titty [bad luck].

**How did you hear that they got AIDS?**

What comes around, gets around, I suppose. It was pretty hush-hush. I know several fellas that met their wives in Hong Kong or Singapore on their R&R and said, "I'm leaving you, see you later," just like that.

31:00 I don't know what gets into them.

**Have you got a theory of why an atmosphere like that would change you?**

No idea. Several of them fell in lust or love or whatever you want to call it with Vietnamese women, they were married happily with kids; no, beyond me.

31:30 The diggers kept getting warned and warned and warned about going to the brothels and all that. Apparently the Polish were the biggest problem there. I suppose not so much the participants side of things in Shanty Town but it had to be seen to be believed.

32:00 It was just like the movies.

**What do you mean by that?**

Fairy lights and the music, one shanty next to another sort of stuff.

**That was the brothel?**

Yeah, Shanty Town, north of town.

**Did the blokes ever talk about their experiences?**

Of course they did.

32:30 That's one avenue I would never want to explore, thank you very much.

**Was it hard to stay faithful?**

For me it was. I had a date with the showers every Saturday night, everyone's in town and I've got the showers all to myself. Well that's the way; I'm sticking to it.

**How often were you in contact with home?**

I was able to ring Lorraine quite often after the first three months because there was no contact whatsoever.

33:00 There was one phone on the floating hotel, an old passenger liner that was done up. That was about five or six US dollars a minute. After a while, we were able to get phone calls home. Eventually after about six months, we had telecom phones, pay phones got it down to about two bucks a minute or thereabouts, three dollars a minute.

33:30 There was a couple of senior officers who got billed big time. There's a long protracted story but...

**Tell the long version.**

Long version, the CO got done twenty-seven thousand dollars US and Ops O [Operations Officer] got done for forty-seven thousand dollars US. Abusing their position, ringing home for hours at a time on a satellite

34:00 phone.

**So they ended up having to pay?**

Yep. I even got done for thirty dollars and I had permission. I got off because my wife was in hospital while I was away. Plumbing trouble while I was away and had to have an operation and I got permission to ring her up and see how she is

34:30 and that was it.

**That must have been a worry?**

Oh yeah. Don't you worry about that. I had my moments. Some of them got caught out big time and rightly so too. That situation we had Regimental Ops in their own little

35:00 world and had the rest of the contingent in a shit hole. Got better obviously down the track because we had locals contracted to build buildings for us and the UN produced air conditioners for the diggers and the officers, poor old sergeants got nothing. That's how it goes sometimes.

**What was the accommodation like?**

35:30 I've got photos and everything, but the diggers' accommodation was sort of a duplicate of the sergeants' lines, we just brought our fans, that's all we had. The diggers they all got air conditioning supplied by the UN, they had warehouses full of them so they procreated them. The officers got air conditioning, but we didn't. That's our fearless RSM, "Lead the way boys!" Yeah right.

36:00 **So why did you miss out?**

Because of the RSM I believe. Show the example, while they've got air conditioning and we haven't. So I

don't know what his mythology was there.

**Did you ever go into the officers' quarters?**

No. We had

36:30 our own little sergeant's mess which we built ourselves. Money raised out of sales, we got ourselves a fridge and it was generator power anyway. We tried to make ourselves as comfortable as we could on our time off.

**What was some of the smaller places that you stayed at when you went around the country?**

Well you had different situations for different places. Say down south they had

37:00 Samron, later named known as Sihanoukville, after Prince Sihanouk, that used to be a French Club Med, the main complex was all burnt and blown up, but all the villas were still intact. They did all them up and a few of our people got billeted into the villas, pretty good-looking villas I tell you. The main contingent there was they had a two or three storey villa,

37:30 vacation centre, kitchens everything, all air conditioned. Thirty-five, forty thousand US rent. About nine months into the trip, the French built a larger complex so they had to move out of the billets and into the military area, plus there is more security with the elections coming up. There were a lot of Indians around that way as well.

**What happened when the elections started? How did that change your job?**

38:00 Basically rules of contact, rules of engagement rather, were raised. We left just prior to the elections because we'd already done our job and we had the rotation, another 500-odd Australians come over and

38:30 we went home. We were glad to get home. They were very hostile as far as I'm aware.

**You were there for twelve months?**

Almost twelve months.

**What, in a working sense, was the most difficult time for you?**

Probably,

39:00 I can't speak for the others, but I was not involved in a car accident but I happened to be in the location of it and I started pointing, because if you are involved in a car accident you just keep going, not only are they going to chase you for compensation and money, but anything could happen. You never admit liability you just keep going. I just helped out with a kid that got bowled over by a truck, a Russian truck, and got splattered. They started

39:30 looking at me, "UN money, money." That got a bit untidy. I jumped in the car and took off like a startled gazelle. Witnessing a murder, seeing a couple of others and the aftermath. Helping the local police with body bags, a bit untidy.

**Why did you have to do that?**

I happened to be the wrong time, the right place at the wrong time, I guess.

40:00 I was on the radio to get the UN Police and the local police who were getting trained up by our Commonwealth Police, Federal Police. So they were there pretty quickly. Basically it was stealing or something like that, a bag of rice and "Bang."

**So you had to help clean up the bodies? What did that involve? Did they go through normal investigation?**

Nothing you could do. Just put them in

40:30 the body bag and dispose of it and the community police would take over from there. It's a civil matter. The only time that was very untidy was the...

## Tape 7

00:35 **What were you going to tell us?**

Just I took some photos probably around about September I think in 1992 in Kompongkleang probably a two hour, three hour north of Phnom Penh, there

01:00 was a mine clearance team going through this little track that we were probably travelling parallel with, we called in to say hello and got talking to the New Zealand mine clearance team. They were training up some locals on clearance, because my vehicle is closest to anyone else a mine went up in his face,

while he was trying to lift it out of the ground, an anti-

- 01:30 personnel mine. All I could do was bundle him up with some rags and went like a bat out hell to a Dutch, no German medical unit in Stungtrang, no sorry Kompongkleang. Got him into hospital and as I was getting him out of the back, I took a couple of photos, for any investigation purposes, but they didn't ask
- 02:00 for them so I kept them. He survived; I think he lost his sight and most of his face. Sort of knocks it back to reality as far as what's really out there. It's going to take them one hundred years they reckon to clear those mines. It's no so much the anti-personnel; they've got these other nasties the Russians created. They drop them out of aircraft and they look like little iridescent butterflies
- 02:30 and they're designed to blow up kids fingers. You can squeeze them half a dozen times before it goes off either orange, iridescent red or iridescent orange or iridescent green and looked like little butterflies. The kids picked them up and squeezed them seven times and number seven goes off. Designed to blow kids fingers off or you walk on it six or seven times before it goes off.

- 03:00 They're a nasty little piece of kit.

**Did you witness any children who had been injured?**

Yeah, amputees, plenty of them. There's an actual rehabilitation hospital behind the national assembly building which later became the UN Headquarters, there's a whole hospital there for amputee rehabilitation, it's mainly arms and limbs, making prosthesis

- 03:30 legs and arms. Different types depends on what's been donated from around the world. Been there a few times and you feel sorry for them. Seen plenty around the countryside, hobbling around. They reckon there is never a day goes past that they don't bring half a dozen kids in for emergency surgery and rehabilitation.

- 04:00 **How did you cope with seeing that?**

Oh hits you pretty hard especially when you've got kids of your own. They're lovely little kids, the most attractive little kids on earth, I reckon, when they're, it's unfortunate that they get ugly when they get older, as far Cambodian type people go. But they're cute little kids and gee you felt sorry for them. In fact I gave away my Christmas present, a little teddy bear, to one

- 04:30 of the ladies we used to pay to come in and clean up our barracks. She used to bring her little kiddie along about so high and it's nearly Christmas and I have to give it to her, that little teddy bear that you sent me. You're always throwing handfuls of money out the window as you're driving past, forgotten what the currency was now, it's not worth a real lot,

- 05:00 a couple of thousand to the dollar and chuck it out to the kids. You feel for them though. There was one orphanage that we used to patronise quite often. The managers of the orphanages built a pizza restaurant upstairs and we used to go there all the time, spend

- 05:30 up big buying pizzas and they weren't too bad either for a Cambodian pizza. A French lady and an Englishman used to run the orphanage. They made a nice pizza. Lorraine used to send me hot salamis from the Victoria Markets and give it to them, "Can you make it extra hot, thanks," and they used to make it up. Very nice.

**Did the money from the restaurant go to the orphanage?**

Yeah. Quite a few of us used to go there

- 06:00 all the time because it was the best pizza shop in town anyway.

**What did you see of the children there at the orphanage?**

Not much, no, not really. You could see them around during the day if you happened to be around that way. It was a bit of a shame seeing them, they're the lucky ones, they were well looked after and well fed. Can't say too much about the other

- 06:30 little kids around the neighbourhood.

**So when you say they were the lucky ones, in what sense?**

They may not have parents any more, but they're well looked after and they're being educated. That's the irony of it, I suppose. We called them the lucky ones.

**What about the kids who you saw who had been injured from minefields?**

You see them all the time. What can you say or do?

- 07:00 Just feel sorry for them.

**What sort of injuries did you observe?**

Missing arms and legs, that's all. Don't notice much else. Hobbling around on a crutch or whatever or begging, picking up charcoal. I saw one girl, probably six or seven, with a basket over her head, she'd been going through all the old fireplaces picking up charcoal.

07:30 She only had one left arm or a left. Just little things like that.

**What went through your head when you saw these sorts of things?**

How much more can these, what else can these people endure? When you think about it, they all should be out in the rice paddies running a farm or something, not living like that in the squalor of a city. Taking into consideration

08:00 the whole of the time we were there, there were over a million and a half Vietnamese in Phnom Penh, half the population and still had trouble trying to get rid of them. That's why they had these race wars going on and claim jumping because all the peasants from Vietnam came in when Vietnam invaded Cambodia just to kick out Pol Pot, and they stayed.

**What was the relationship like between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians?**

Oh bad, they hated each other's guts.

08:30 Not too good at all.

**How did it manifest itself?**

I don't know, We didn't take that much interest, only because of the history that they'd been fighting each other for thousands of years anyway. If they want to beat themselves up with sticks, let them to it.

**You were surrounded by conflicts in every sense?**

Yeah. You kept thinking, "Why are we here?"

09:00 I might be doing my job, but what's the UN doing? I think they may have a show of force, but especially watching the news after I come home, during the elections you could see a lot more troops around polling booths and that sort of stuff. You don't see what happens up country and how the voting is rigged.

09:30 I heard a lot about that, just by watching the news. Prince Sihanouk's son or brother is one of the co-leaders of the country now and Hung Sen, you don't hear much about what comes out of the country these days. Apart from a murder, or another Australian backpacker goes missing or stuff

10:00 like that. You don't hear much at all that goes on there now.

**You said you wondered sometimes why you were, what did you actually think about the UN operations while you were over there?**

A bit of an overkill, just for the sheer weight of the bureaucracy. I know it can be a slow process, it's pretty hard to explain, but

10:30 maybe they went in too heavy as far as the bureaucrats go. A bit more show of strength as far as the UN goes. Our first impression of the UN was the toothless tiger and that's been going for thirty years. You may take one wrong move and you've got the UN on your back.

11:00 What's his name, Hitachi, number two in the UN, he was there upstairs from me and he was the biggest whinging so and so I've ever come across, because he couldn't get his way or he couldn't get a parking spot or someone's blocked his car. A bit hard.

**How frustrating was that for you?**

11:30 Extremely. Especially in my position. I'm in the limelight I'm the one carrying the Australian flag so to speak because we're so high profile people just by the fact that we are delivering mail and not so much personal mail for the other UN personnel, it was only for Australians, just official mail.

12:00 Because of the high profile, you couldn't make any wrong moves or make a mistake if, where at all possible, that's why I had all my bases covered as far as recording and registering mail that needed to be.

**Were there specific examples of how the UN operated that frustrated you?**

Me? Initially when I was trying to get dedicated aircraft. I virtually

12:30 succeeded anyway, but I got to a point where I was so pissed off that when my mate from upstairs came down for a brew, General Sanderson, when I spilled my guts and cracked the shits, the next day I get my dedicated aircraft. All because I went through a process, from one department to another, I just kept saying, "Do you want your mail delivered or not? How are you going to get it up to Indian country?"

13:00 What if you wanted something delivered here tomorrow when you may not get another aircraft up there

for another week and we can do it every 48 hours?" They'd say, "I know, I know but we've got to go." Yeah right. The Dutch were a part of...Movements Control was controlled by the Dutch and they didn't have a clue. They were more interested in moving logistics, you know, heavy stuff.

13:30 How can you order heavy stuff, if you can't get the mail through?

**So how important would you describe your role?**

Red hot. Red hot from the time I got there to the time I come home. Because like I said more high profile, we'd be the most high profile

14:00 people in the country just about as far as getting things done and getting messages and information through. Sure you've got radio communications all over the place, but the general run of the mill administration type paperwork that's got to point A to point B, well you've got to have a reliable courier system around the country in such situations as you had in Cambodia.

14:30 I was pretty proud that we did more than we were asked to do I think.

**As you were flying around the country, you must have seen everything there was to see really.**

Virtually.

**Can you describe some of the landscapes?**

I got a surprise. We knew there was a big escarpment that goes from the gulf of Thailand all the way across the top of Cambodia

15:00 across to Laos and down the Vietnamese border almost. It's quite a big mountain range. I think nearly as long as the Great Dividing Range if you think about it. In the middle of the country it's flat with a few hills and a bloody great big lake in the middle of it and it's fed by a river that flows either way twice a year. Flows both ways, which is a bit of a

15:30 phenomenon. It will flow out during the dry season, but when the Mekong River fills up it pushes the water back in and the river flows backwards. So you've got a flaming big lake in the middle of the country, a dry season that's a flaming dust bowl and you've got rainforest all around you. It's strange sort of country to be in. Damned hot, I

16:00 think I only had one cold night in the whole twelve months I was there. When you get there and into it, it's a beautiful little country, especially around the mountains. Not a bad little coastline down near the old French Club Med, lovely little beaches. While I was waiting for an aircraft, I found this little Cambodian seafood restaurant left over from the old Club Med

16:30 days and they started it up and I had prawns, I had crayfish and had this, that and the other and it cost me about two dollars. I was as happy as Larry. It's a lovely little country when you think about it, put all their woes behind them and you have a closer look at the place. Unless you like the smell of cat's urine, Angkor Wat is nothing to rave about really.

17:00 It's stinks and quite impressive at the same time.

**So you went to see that?**

Yeah. I went there a couple of times. The only thing is it's still mined to buggery so you have to be careful which way you go, they have specific areas where you can drive around and walk around, but out of those perimeters you're on your own. Whether the mine clearance teams have been through, who knows?

17:30 Not far from Stungtrang there's, which is just south of Angkor Wat, everyone talks about the killing fields and all that sort of stuff, well, we know of one that holds two or three hundred thousand people. When the Vietnamese invaded they brought with them millions upon millions of Australian gum tress, natives and planted them everywhere, literally millions.

18:00 Every highway and road is lined with Australian gum trees and there's one particular block, it's a five-acre block they've got mountain ash and nearly two hundred foot high because they've got good fertiliser, two or three hundred thousand people just in one five-acre block. That's how these gum tress have done so well. Did you think mountain ash would grow outside of Victoria?

18:30 **It's mind boggling when you describe things like that. How do you come to terms with what had happened there?**

Sense of humour, not in that regard, but I found it pretty shocking, heart rending, but at the same time you've got to keep some sort of sense of humour otherwise

19:00 a fella would go insane. Lots of areas around Phnom Penh where you can actually physically see where thousands upon thousands of people have been buried, but they only have one particular area that has been sanctioned off as the killing fields, south west of the city. You can't help but walk everywhere around the killing fields without walking on bits of the clothing and teeth, bones, fingernails

- 19:30 and most of them have been dug up, put into a shrine. Unless you see the films and the photos, you can't really appreciate what it's all about until you actually stand there yourself. The whole ground is covered in human remains. It doesn't matter where you walk, you can't help standing on them.
- 20:00 Sort of makes you think. Sort of affects me in a way sometimes. I suppose it affects people in different ways.
- Do you still think about that?**
- Yeah, sometimes.
- 20:30 It's just, maybe you're lugging your pack and weapon around and it's not that you've actually got these mosquitos flying past you all the time, it's just the apprehension of it all when you're out there on your own, out up country. That first time we spent the night in the ulu [wilderness, bush], those first two nights well
- 21:00 I had two drunk Russian ex-MiG helicopter pilots, MiG fighter pilots from Afghanistan who couldn't read a GPS and I got these idiots around in the jungle with these whistles. I was the one who stayed up all night with my weapon trained at them. I don't know if they were kids or playing mind games, I don't know. Ended up being friendlies. So that sort of stuff sort of bugs me every now and again too.
- 21:30 That's all what ifs and all that, scary sometimes. But when you get back to base and they didn't even know that you're bloody missing then you start freaking out and start cursing and cussing. I'll drink another carton of VB and I'll feel better in the morning.
- So what sort of things did you do to cope with that constant tension?**
- Drink.
- 22:00 Like you'd have a real bad day, or you've had a long day and you've had to do some tasks around country or whatever and you've been in an aircraft for over eight and a half, nine hours and you're really cranky and all you want to do is drink a million beers and go to bed, and not punch walls or pick fights or anything like that. It's, "Just leave me alone I want to drink a million beers and then go to bed."
- 22:30 So that's the best way I coped. Different when you couldn't get hold of a decent beer, that was a different kettle of fish, when you had to drink Steinlager and Becks and...Tiger's not too bad when you can get it cold. But I guess that was one way for me to escape reality I guess.
- How well did you sleep?**
- Over there, pretty well.
- 23:00 A bit uncomfortable to start off with I guess. Once I found a fan, a reasonable fan from the markets, because I couldn't get one out of the system, all they had was air conditioners, there's not use putting an air conditioner in my little hut. Anyway once you got yourself tucked in nice and secure as long as there's nothing under your mattress, so no ground crawler can get in with you, the fan was fine, I used to sleep all right.
- 23:30 A lot of blokes bought beds from the markets, I was just happy with my stretcher.
- So your nerves didn't keep you awake?**
- You'd be on edge if you started to hear some tracers whizzing over the roof or stuff like that, not that we had a lot of that, unless there was a full moon. Not a real lot happened in town as far as, while there was a lot of murders
- 24:00 and a lot of shooting and stuff like that, in our regard we were a fair way out of town so we were happy as Larry. The Ops were in a very secure area of town anyway, not that we cared much about them. Oh no, we were pretty secure. I slept all right. I had plenty of green sleeping tablets.
- 24:30 **Just going back to those incidents where you were actually involved in having to clear away dead bodies, what gave you the strength to do that?**
- Compulsion, I guess on the spot. I only saw the one but I've seen the aftermath of a couple. You just feel sorry. She probably just pinched a bit of money or a bag of rice or something, she's probably got a couple
- 25:00 of kids she didn't look all that old. Basically she got chased from behind, hit with a .45 and down she went. I'm just driving past and, "Bloody hell," he runs off and I'm out seeing if I can assist, but no. I was on the radio straightaway. Brains weren't too far away as far as the police are concerned. All I could say was to point where the fella went.
- 25:30 **What about the incident where you described someone being attacked with a machete?**
- That was claim jumping. That was after a fire in Shanty Town. That's basically it. Just witnessed a fella being hacked to death, he was threatening the other people with a grenade and I believe he was a Vietnamese, I'm not sure. They all looked pretty much the same. The fella that was



26:00 threatening the other people with the grenade got hacked to death.

**By several people?**

Oh yeah, they were into him.

**So you, as a member of the UN peacekeeping force and whoever you were with**

I was armed.

**You couldn't do anything?**

Oh I tried to do, nothing you could do. Once they saw me, I was armed, they pushed the grenade into my chest and I freaked,

26:30 because I was splattered with blood and everything and took the grenade and secured it. Nothing else you could do by the time I got into the car they'd dragged him off anyway. You wouldn't have a clue where they dragged him off to. So, they basically even the UN Police well they're not going to do nothing about it. They're just squabbling over bits of land after the fire went through. Even the bomb disposal fella said to me,

27:00 "Why didn't you just pull the pin and just chuck it into the river?" and I said, "Yeah, I'd like to see you do that. Probably go off about six inches from my hand. I'm not stupid. You go and take it away and blow it up somewhere else, fella." That's about it as far as that situation goes. You put your incident reports in and it doesn't go any further than that.

27:30 **So what did it make you think about witnessing that kind of inhumanity?**

Life's cheap, life's cheap to them in that sort of situation and in that particularly shanty town life was obviously cheap. They might be fighting over a ten by ten piece of dirt for all I know. If it's worth that, let them go for it.

28:00 What can you do?

**What sort of relationship did you have with the local Cambodian people?**

When you're out and about, once we got out things sort of slowed down there for a while before the elections and you could get out there in your civvies and your shorts and you could get out to the markets and buy some fake Levis for the kids and all that sort of stuff. They're great you can haggle with them, have a ball with them.

28:30 With a little bit of Cambodian that you picked up, you could have a field day with these people. You're really getting into serious bartering while you're having a good time at the same time. They know it. I picked up quite a few bargains, we even had a motto for every time I went shopping I always remembered the three Rs - Revis, Raybans, ReCoste [Levi's jeans, Rayban sunglasses, LaCoste shirts; probably fakes].

29:00 That was our motto. So we didn't get out shopping very much and when we did we had a ball.

**Did you develop any close relationships with any Cambodians?**

Maybe one lady that was in the Russian markets. She managed to find out what beer we drank, which is VB, and we called it the VB Bar.

29:30 She had great kids, a husband, making a few quid out of us, which we didn't mind, a dollar a can US wasn't all that expensive and I'd be very thirsty after a day's full on shopping. Apart from our interpreters, about the only people I suppose were the people at the markets,

30:00 and the lady at the VB shop. I probably got them kick started for something else that they wanted to get into later after we left.

**How did the local people appear to think about you being there?**

To us personally they were quite friendly. We had no problems with them at all, as long as they kept out of our way while we were on the road everything was fine because they

30:30 don't have any road rules. What's left and what's right, what's an indicator, they just give a nervous shuffle with their hand when they're going to turn right that's their indicator or left. We went out of our way not to knock anyone over, but gee they're bloody crazy I tell you. What rules, there's no rules over there except that they drive on the right hand side of the road, the

31:00 wrong side of the road. We had no problems really. We had a ball of fun when we would get out, all in all pretty friendly people.

**Did you have any leave while you were there?**

No. Only just the odd weekend. They used to have curfews for the first three-quarters of the trip. Like

- 31:30 I was putting in fourteen, fifteen-hour days for the first six months; I didn't get much time to myself except for Sunday off. Then it relaxed even further, you had to be in by ten o'clock at night and it got relaxed again and for those who could take off Friday and come back Sunday night, ten o'clock curfew. So you could get the whole weekend away. For those who were up country, they did it all the time.
- 32:00 That was the other army; they were sneaking across the Thai border into all the resorts unbeknown to the people in Phnom Penh, the ones doing all the hard work. After six months I had my first lot of R&R, I went back to Australia. The second lot of R&R was after twelve months I brought Lorraine over to Singapore, seven days in Singapore back to Bangkok and she flew home.
- 32:30 **What was it like to be back in Australia when you came home after six months?**
- Cold, went straight to the snow.
- Did it seem strange in any way?**
- The traffic mainly even after six months. We loaded the kids up and went straight to the snow. I was in thongs and stubbies and tee shirt until I went blue I said, "It's cold, it's beautiful, I love it." As soon as I
- 33:00 turned blue, I got changed into warmer stuff. No, it was great.
- Was it hard to leave again?**
- Ooh yeah, very hard. Knowing that, that was around about September I saw Lorraine four months later anyway. She come across to Singapore.
- 33:30 Add an extra two days because I spent seven days in Singapore and two days in Bangkok because of air connections. Squeeze an extra two days out of the UN, that's not too bad. You could fly anywhere in the world if you wanted to at the UN's expense, a bit of a perk. I don't think any Australian contingent ever, ever had done this before to my knowledge. You could have R&R
- 34:00 but not to any location in the world, five star restaurants, never heard of that before and all paid by the UN.
- So that must have been kind of nice?**
- It was a perk, but I don't think it'll ever happen again.
- 34:30 **You described the scene when you first arrived as sort of devastation and no infrastructure, by the time you'd left what sort of changes had you seen?**
- Substantial, all the investors from Thailand were moving in and all over the world they were moving in. Like the photos I can show you the Cambodiana Hotel, massive, absolutely massive, I hadn't seen it before we arrived, where Prince Sihanouk resides. Had floating hotels.
- 35:00 There was a huge amount of building going on, infrastructure back to normal to a degree, don't know about the sewage though.
- How long did that take to get back to normal?**
- That was ongoing until the day I left. When we first arrived, you were lucky to see a car on the road, I know there were three taxis in town and the only vehicles in town, push bikes everywhere and the odd motorcycle and within a
- 35:30 matter of weeks, there were hundreds of cars, Russian trucks, lots more motorcycles and you'd wonder where the hell they all come from. Obviously come from black market Vietnam or Thailand or whatever. Six months into the tour there are cars everywhere.
- 36:00 **What about living conditions, water and power?**
- Don't know so much about the water. I don't know where they got their water from, mainly from the bore or straight out of the Mekong River. They must have had some sort of water filtration because everyone craps in it and throws everything in it, you name it they throw it in the river. Power, that's a mystery to me. I never found out where they got their power from. Must have been from banks of generators from somewhere.
- 36:30 It was every man for himself. You'd see people climb up power poles with some alligator clips and hook in and plug in the TV. You'd see alligator clips hanging out of power poles, one hundred and ten volts, God knows what they're operating but you'd see them clambering up; every now and again you'd see one barbecued up on the power pole. We thought it was funny at the time. Pinching power.
- 37:00 No one's going to get him down, who the hell's going to take him down. Everyone just goes along about their business. That was a common occurrence, people going up power poles pinching power. It was a spider web of power cables coming out of houses and buildings. I've got a few photos of that too, quite amazing. I still to this day, I don't know where the
- 37:30 hell they got their power from. Must have had banks of generators somewhere. I don't think they've got

any kind of hydroelectric system anywhere, so they must have generators somewhere.

**So how much do you think the UN presence in the country contributed to the progress that was made?**

Well they were bringing all the money. Some of these UN people were living like kings, the restaurant industry, the accommodation industry, any sort of industry,

38:00 the UN was bringing all the money in. I wouldn't say so much the locals, but the Thais and Vietnamese were making a lot of money out of it even though they were living in country. So they're obviously producing some sort of income for the lower rung in the ladder. They've got to bring fuel in from somewhere and someone's got to buy it and bottled water and food.

38:30 You had UN-sponsored programmes coming in and all that sort of stuff. Cambodia makes enough to subsidise itself I guess. It's hard to say, I'm no economist, but you could see what's happening with the amount of wealth that the UN was bringing in. Just by virtue of the presence of the numbers of the UN it's obviously going into the economy. Somehow.

39:00 **So although you criticise the UN for having an overkill of bureaucracy, if you like, what was the best thing about their presence there do you think?**

I suppose apart from sponsoring the peace process or ratifying it rather, I don't know, just it's presence I guess.

39:30 So all parties can see this is what the UN's doing and this is what it's doing for us and whether the elections worked or not, I don't know I don't have a clue. I'm home.

**Was it a toothless tiger in Cambodia?**

To a degree I thought it was, and prior to Cambodia I always thought it was. Apart from Korea, I don't know what the hell it's done successfully, since Korea.

40:00 I can't think of a single, apart from famine rescues and things like that, I don't know what they've achieved apart from a lot of talking. That's my perception of the whole organization. I may be wrong, but that's my perception of it. All I could see was the UN

40:30 action in Korea was a complete success. Maybe MacArthur wanted to keep going, but they stopped him or Truman did or whoever. As far as the rest of what they've done, you can only look at Israel and Palestine. What have they done? Let the Jewish people run the US government. That's a contentious issue as well.

41:00 What's the UN done? Sent a few observation officers, monitoring officers, that's all they do. I may be naïve but I do not understand what they've done in the last twenty years, thirty years.

## Tape 8

00:00 **Could you explain your job in Cambodia?**

Oh. I was basically tasked with establishing and raising a courier system throughout Cambodia for the UN. At the end of the tour, I suppose as far as tonnage goes, I think we did better than any Australian unit in the Second World War as far as passage of official mail. So we're talking a lot of tonnes

01:00 over a twelve month period. As far as the courier system which included an air dispatch service where we circumnavigated the country six days a week that included all section, provincial and individual unit headquarters throughout the country along the Vietnamese, Laos and Thai border where

01:30 we had Australian troops in the form of one-man, two-man section radio detachments in support of the UN military officers who were in charge of border crossings, initiating the return of two or three million refugees from Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, to be rehabilitated back into Cambodia.

02:00 Now as far as establishing the actual system one is air dispatch service. We finally established a timetable which gave each individual UN unit a window in which we'd arrive and allow some time to get any mail ready, met us at the airstrip and we'd radio ahead to say that we're five minutes

02:30 out, make sure you're there otherwise you miss out. We supported in particular our Australian troops in those positions, primarily with fresh rations, money, wages and anything else we could lay our hands on back in Phnom Penh. Several soldiers were very isolated so we went out of our way to pick up a little bit extra. The courier

03:00 system itself in Phnom Penh, we had again a signal dispatch service twice a day to some ninety to a hundred individual destinations around Phnom Penh. Also we had a dispatch rider service to be able to go to the drop of a hat to deliver a flash of immediate signals to various UN positions around town. So basically,

- 03:30 all-in-all we had some forty-five Australian and New Zealand, two New Zealanders I think it was, forty-five personnel, five or six corporals, and two sergeants. The other sergeant was sent over to Battambang where he established his own, like I said sector headquarters had their own internal delivery service because our main service
- 04:00 delivered to, like I said, sector and provincial headquarters, whereas our people out in the field would then be able to deliver down to sub-unit level the actual mail delivery. Like I said, around town we had SDS service twenty-four hours a day where any immediate or flash signals could be delivered immediately. So in support of UN it was very
- 04:30 successful, it virtually ran itself after a period of time. As far as we are concerned we've given ourselves a pat on the back. That's basically it.

**When you first got to Cambodia with such an enormous task ahead of you, what did you first put in place?**

I had Standard Operating Procedures, which I produced, it gave all the addressees at least an idea of what is

- 05:00 required, what they can and can't send through the mail, or through the official registry, gives them a window also of delivery times, pick up times and like I said, it gave them a window of when the arrival time would be so they would have all their outgoing correspondence ready. From there it would be returned to UN headquarters and be sorted and redirected.
- 05:30 **How did you get everybody on staff, if you like, worked out into their different areas?**
- It wasn't done by me personally, it would have been done by my own ops, they would've had a requirement of how many people they would have liked up country. I had a minimum amount that I required to run the actual air dispatch service, we had two drivers or transport personnel would be required to go
- 06:00 on each flight so they gave us a window of how many people we needed on the ground, how many people we needed to upkeep the SDS service and the courier system around Phnom Penh and a dispatch rider. That way ops distributed staff that I needed to operate up country.

- 06:30 **You said as part of the standard operating procedures there were some things they could and couldn't send, can you explain that a little more?**

Apart from ourselves, money, valuable and flammable materials. We had our own system just by supporting our own troops in the field where they could get money for rent before any other infrastructure was provided at that particular sector or area, where they had to be

- 07:00 paying for rent and food, wherever he's being billeted, that's basically where we supported our own troops. Our aircraft was dedicated to me only and was only used for me, if someone wanted a lift no problems if there was room, but if they wanted to go anywhere else it's tough.

**Prior to having that dedicated aircraft what were the problems you were running up against?**

I was just told, because it was

- 07:30 very ad hoc at the start, place a mailbag on an aircraft and hope it gets there and that was it. Items went missing, money went missing and that created a problem for them which was necessitated by I should have a dedicated aircraft. That was successful after about of three months in the country.

**There must have been an enormous amount of traffic happening at your base?**

Oh yeah.

**How did that get organised?**

The Communications

- 08:00 Centre itself was in the dungeon as we called it, underneath, in a cellar below UN headquarters, which is the old National Assembly Building for the Cambodian Government. From there whatever traffic depending on where it's going, could be going up country or it's going to be transmitted back to Australia and from Australia into the DEFCOM and from DEFCOMNET worldwide.
- 08:30 Obviously satellite communication come into play so a lot of the heavy communications equipment wasn't necessary except for Australia's own traffic to go back home. Once the satellite systems were in place it was basically, you could sit behind the computer terminal and send emails all over the world.

**So when you went into the dungeon, can you describe for us what you would see? Walk me through it.**

- 09:00 It wasn't real tidy when we first got there. We had to do a lot of cleaning and an awful lot of excrement. Very, very smelly, very dank and damp.

**This used to be a prison?**

An awful lot of untidy things happened down there, we know that, you don't have to be Einstein to work out what stains are what. Yes, there was a lot of clean up happening,

09:30 a lot of painting so that it was habitable for the Communication Centre. I had my main office next to the Communication Centre, out of necessity because we are the ones that they are going to get to deliver articles to point A to point B. Being as damp and dank as it was, we had problems with scorpions, big black ones, they were quite frequent.

10:00 Dark and dingy and there was an old spiral staircase, concrete staircase, used to go upstairs and lead into the back office of General Sanderson, that was his escape route down to us to have a brew without being bothered by other creatures.

**What else was in that room? How many people worked in there?**

There was only two or three people in my office. We did have a mail sorting room next to it but that was basically all that was there.

10:30 There was an Australian warrant officer who in conjunction with the UN registry, mail registry but apart from that was all, it was just Australians downstairs. There was a guardroom out the front, Indonesian infantry battalion who provided security for that particular building, downstairs that was basically it.

**You said that you had a South African superior?**

11:00 No, he was, we called him the anti-Christ, but the story went that, we didn't like him very much anyway, he tried to join the Australian Army quite a long time ago, he was knocked back so he went and joined the British Army, spent a very short time in the British Army and transferred to the Australian Army.

11:30 Very hard to work with, I was berated by him a couple of times in front of my own soldiers, we found him to be very schizophrenic and maniac.

**What was his role?**

He was a major in the Australian Army as an OC of one of the squadrons. He was moved very quickly to another squadron.

12:00 **Why did you have to answer to him at all?**

At the time, he was my OC and quickly he saw his ways when he was moved.

**Who was he replaced by?**

I can't remember his name off the top of my head.

**Better working relationship?**

Very knowledgeable academic type officer, a field officer, very easy to work with

12:30 and he was the one who assisted me with coming up with a computer program for time and distance studies for air flights, delivery times and instrumental in providing me with a form of a timetable for the dispatch service which proved to be very successful.

**What was involved in setting that up?**

I'm no computer whiz, but it's just a program that he was able to procure

13:00 and it calculates the airspeed against wind speed against distance and all that sort of stuff. I wouldn't have a clue how it works, but it worked.

**So it would give you specific times to get to those locations?**

Yes. So we'd give a window, most of it turned out pretty correct, I changed it a few times, but just did time and motion studies as we went along and we'd take out an average and put down a mean destination time

13:30 average and it just gave them a window to get everything ready, because we don't wait obviously we can't delay anyone else.

**You said that the six-day sorties around the country, can you describe one of those?**

Basically the drivers would first have to go into the office and open the safe,

14:00 get any envelopes there that are registered with a signature page, into a briefcase, all the way back to the airport, the mailbags are already loaded up in the Land Cruiser already because it's a lockable vehicle, at the airport by six to depart ten past six. You'd be back at six o'clock that evening. So flying time was approximately eight hours and ten minutes and the

14:30 rest of the time is refuelling, up and down and moving. Over eight hours flying time on each flight. So it's pretty taxing on the eardrums and the lack of sleep.

**What did you do in the eight hours?**

Try to sleep in an aircraft, it's pretty hard when it's as noisy as that. You'd have everything ready for the next drop, not a real lot to do except take in the scenery.

15:00 **Would you stay in any of those places?**

No you'd just drop them and keep going. On a lot of the sections of the route we'd be flying between fifteen and seventeen thousand feet and purely because of safety reasons. Hardly a day that would go past that you wouldn't see a hole in your rotor blades or take a few rounds every now and again.

15:30 That's why we used to fly so high. The French had a different method by flying at tree level, but that was too damned dangerous. We never used to work with the French unless we had to.

**Who was relying on this material the most from you?**

The whole mission really, when you think about it we're talking about the whole of the UN and the whole infrastructure

16:00 and how it was displaced around the crossing, border crossings. Everything relied on us.

**Can you remember a time when there was a breakdown with the system that you created, if ever?**

It didn't really breakdown, it was just the initial setting up of it. It was just the brick wall, banging your head on the brick wall "Where's my aircraft?"

16:30 'Just chuck it on an aircraft, it'll get there' syndrome, no that didn't work. I had great pleasure in handing that missing bag of thirty-seven thousand dollars US over to my regimental officer and saying, "This is the reason I wanted my aircraft earlier. Go and check what's inside that bag and you'll find thirty grand US." Maybe I should have kept it and sent it home.

**So after the aircraft came on board were there any periods when there was too much information to disseminate?**

17:00 Our system basically backed up the communication system, which was already in place anyway. You had HF [High Frequency] comms radio relay, you had by virtue of telephone radio relay and they were situated all over the country, line of sight communications via telephone. HF, VHF [Very High Frequency], to a lesser degree in the early days

17:30 satellite communications. So what we were providing is hard copy of information, what they weren't getting electronically we were delivering hard copy including all your paraphernalia regarding paperwork, official mail. Later on in the mission we had doubled our tonnage in a matter of weeks because of the electoral paperwork, voting cards, ID [Identification] cards for several million people.

18:00 **How did that affect the job?**

Totally. Just our, we couldn't take passengers any more, we were carrying over a tonne and a half of mail a day on certain occasions of course, mostly they were a half a tonne of mail. That's an awful lot.

**Did you have a good working relationship with the pilots?**

If they're sober, yeah.

18:30 **What happened there?**

They're ex-Russian MiG pilots from the Afghan War, obviously got themselves a job as chopper pilots for the UN mission. They'd keep awake or sane by having their chilled flask of vodka and here they were, all day. That was a bit of a hoot.

**Was that a worry?**

I even took over the controls a couple of times just having a bit of a fly.

19:00 It wasn't too hard either. Don't know about the taking off and getting down again, but in a straight line it was pretty easy.

**Did you ever have to land it?**

No. No. That'd be untidy.

**Were there ever any hairy landings?**

One of my drivers landed, that was a bit bumpy, I wasn't game. But one of the drivers, he'd been flying quite a long

19:30 time and he's taken controls a few times and he's having a go and he actually took off and landed. He was a driver. So, that happens.

**Did the UN ever ask you to do anything that was beyond the capabilities of the system that**

**you had or that you just couldn't do?**

No not really. I think we were stretched to our limit as it was.

20:00 I had to drag in drivers from up country to help out once the volume of mail increased, because we had to increase flights. Getting close to the elections was when I dragged in an extra half a dozen drivers from around the country just to support us so we could get some rest, some sleep and some R&R too, because we hadn't had any. So I dragged

20:30 half a dozen back in, they took over and they were right as rain.

**You said that at the beginning you were doing eighteen-hour days?**

We were.

**How did you keep up?**

It was very difficult because basically trying to get down to a system, and a daily routine, because everything was changing hourly, you were

21:00 trying to locate UN officers, "Where's our mail?" "Where are you?" in pidgin English try and explain what address they're at. "You'd better come in here and how me where you are." So out we'd go, plot it on a map and back in and put it, include it in the timetable, back to the computer print out a new timetable and send it out to all addressees so they'd know their timetables changed. So that was part and parcel of a lot

21:30 hours. Basically we were trying to get a routine going, that was the hard part. The first few months we didn't even get back to our compound until well after eight or nine o'clock at night. Dinner is about six, so we'd go out to a street stall and have a feed of rice, orange duck or something that winks back you

22:00 but we made do.

**Did you like that local food?**

Yeah, it wasn't too bad. Some of it wasn't bad. Some of it was pretty atrocious especially the stuff that winks back at you. We made a point of, I think it's called the Ambassador Hotel, it was pretty swanky, it was only just finished when we arrived, but we were having a Chinese feed there and this fella reached over me back and put down half dozen

22:30 tall bottles of Fosters and said, "Have a good one on me, fellas," it was Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward. They were doing a documentary in Cambodia. Don't know what about because I got blind rotten drunk so I don't know much about it. I had a few beers with Bryan Brown, a bit of a hoot.

**What sort of a bloke was he?**

Yeah, down to earth, just like me talking. He's fine.

**Did he want to know about all the stuff that you were doing?**

23:00 He wasn't really interested, no, wasn't really interested at all. He was doing something completely different, I don't know peasants out in the paddies as far as I know. He was doing something in cahoots with UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], he was doing something for them. He wasn't real interested about the UN. I'm not exactly sure, I got blind rotten drunk with him.

23:30 It was an enjoyable night out anyway.

**How did he know?**

We were in uniform. As soon as he saw the Australian flag he just plonked down half a dozen Fosters tallies. "Where in the hell did you get that from?" "Don't worry, I've got a boot full."

**Where was that?**

The Ambassador Hotel, just on the outskirts of town near our compound.

**What was the hotel like?**

Pretty swank and flashy.

24:00 Like I said, it had only just got built or just finished not long after we arrived and it was pretty upmarket when you compare it to the rest of the country. Obviously someone was doing pretty well. These were the sort of hotels that started popping up all over the place and hence all the money from the UN was pouring in. Instead of sleeping in air-conditioned dongas [huts], they can sleep in an air-conditioned hotel room.

24:30 So I suppose that's how all the money was getting poured into the economy I guess.

**What were the locals saying at that stage about Pol Pot or what were the rumours?**

They never talked about him. They'd say, "Pol Pot," and they'd go, "Oh no, pattay, pattay, pattay." "No,

no, no.” They refused to talk about him.

25:00 “Very bad, very bad.”

**Were there rumours about where he was or what had happened to him?**

No. I think everyone knew where he was. It would have obviously been around the Pailin area, his brother come from, they actually come from not far from Kompongkleang, that’s where he originally come from, his relatives are around that way, he could have been there or he could have been in Pailin, he could’ve been anywhere, considering he only died a couple of years ago.

25:30 **Was he still a threat when you were there?**

Well, who knows, no idea. We knew he was about, but no one could say whether he was alive or dead. His little lieutenants were about all right.

**When you went into areas near Pailin, was it threatening considering he was around there?**

No, not really. We had military people there, the Dutch infantry battalion.

26:00 They sort of kept things under control to a degree, but they never left their little fortress very often, so to speak. They formed their little niche, form your wagons and they stayed there. We were landing there daily, there was no real problems. I had to go into town a few times, to do a bit of negotiating and liaising or whatever, but I never had any problems

26:30 with them.

**What sort of negotiations were you doing?**

Just basically negotiating with the OC in charge of the UN element and he’d pass it down to his administration people as far as when the mail’s going to be ready, here’s the change of the timetable, are there any problems, I’d ask them if they have any problems with the system, have you any ideas

27:00 or whatever, we’ll take any ideas and take it on board and if we can improve it we will. So I did a lot of that and that’s why I did a lot of travelling around, just to make sure everything was above board and being run properly.

**What were the suggestions for improvement that helped out?**

I didn’t get that many. That’s just being diplomatic asking if you have any suggestions, send them by all means. Didn’t have any come back,

27:30 or input really.

**It sounds like you were doing a lot of work and long hours. You’ve talked about your superiors not doing much. What were they supposed to be doing?**

A good question. No, good question. You’ve got me stumped. I have no idea. Obviously, they’d have to be doing a lot of liaising, getting communications up and running and

28:00 stuff like that, but junior officers can do that. No idea, except organising UN games and junkets like that. It was a good PR [Public Relations] job but that was about it.

**Do you mean the UN Games?**

Yeah, in conjunction with the Atlanta Games. That was a big turn out.

**Can you describe the hierarchy above you then?**

28:30 The CO was Colonel Ayling, then we had Major Glenn was the Ops O, RSM Barry Martin, they were sort of self-congratulatory type people who all gave themselves OAMs [Order of Australia Medal] at the end of the mission. Need I say more.

**How did you feel about that?**

I don’t care much about OAMs, but I got a pat on the back from my own peers so I was happy with that.

29:00 **Does that go on a lot?**

Yeah. They’ll put themselves in for OAMs. A lot of them probably deserve it for all I know, but there’s a lot of them that don’t.

**From what you saw on that operation did they?**

I reckon so, to a degree, but not to each other, “You nominate me and I’ll nominate you.”

29:30 There’s a lot of people there that should have got one, a lot more recognition. If I get a Distinguished Service Cross by getting shot in the hand by sitting in a helicopter, what’s the mythology, it’s past me.

**How did you deal with that frustration of seeing what they were doing, seeing the affluent**



**lifestyle they were living, at the time what did you do?**

- 30:00 What could you do except mumble with the rest of us. It was “them” and “us” syndrome. That stuck and lost a lot of respect for them. Things changed when we had the new CO and the new Ops group come and replace the old and everything changed. They all moved into the rest of the Australian contingent, closed down the old Kangaroo, which is Pattaya House. They all
- 30:30 moved into the Australian contingent. Colonel Stoddard’s a damned good field officer, they had an excellent RSM but all-in-all, everything changed. Everyone knew what was happening the next whenever. We had, there was a regimental meeting every Sunday morning, so everyone had to attend the padre’s
- 31:00 church service, it was parade so you had to be there. Anyway, you couldn’t miss out on the padre’s sermon, we got sucked in there big time. He’d get up and he’d tell us exactly what was going on, prior to that we didn’t, and that was a bit of a buzz and we appreciated that. Prior to that, we didn’t know what the hell was going on.

**How far into your year did that happen?**

- 31:30 That was around about November I think, later on in the year just before Christmas and I was asked to fly to Bangkok, meet the new ops group and then escort them over. Yeah, because I knew them all and they knew me from experience from other postings and stuff. That was a bit of a buzz.

**Did you tell him what you thought of the guys that were there before them?**

- 32:00 Yep, yep, they appreciated that a lot. Even though I had a lot of respect for the old CO because I had already served with him prior, he’s a good academic type officer, but Colonel Stoddard’s a very good field officer. That’s picking beans, but
- 32:30 started to get a lot more professional after that. I knew exactly what’s happening, what’s on the board, what’s going to happen, any projected happenings as to what’s going to be happening with the reinforcement group that’s coming over to replace us, when it’s going to happen, at the end of the day, when we’re going home and all that. He briefed us every Sunday morning.
- 33:00 “But don’t go anywhere, the padre’s next.”

**How long did you have to hang around for the padre?**

Half an hour, he’d gibber on, he was Scottish so I could hardly understand a word he said, he’s a Salvation Army padre.

**Was it a religious country?**

Buddhist.

**What sort of evidence of that was there?**

- 33:30 Everywhere. Temples everywhere. Oh, temples were everywhere. I can’t think of the name of the term now, but there were Buddhist temples everywhere, it was predominantly Buddhist. It was revered and openly practiced over there.

**How did the Indian and Pakistan army soldiers treat the locals?**

I think they were more interested in smuggling UN vehicles out of the country and everything that they could lay their hands on, until they got caught. They were trying to smuggle Land Cruisers out through shipping containers and a shipping container full of computer gear and so they lost a lot of credibility out of that trip.

**Was that black market trade a problem for the UN?**

- 34:30 Not for the UN as much because there was no import tax infrastructure so you might as well call it all black market. It enters the country, there’s no import tax that’s why everything’s so cheap, everything’s smuggled in, including everything that runs on petrol, like cars, bikes, generators.
- 35:00 We don’t know about illicit drugs or anything like that, but just about anything you think of is smuggled in. Whereas the, I suppose the government or if you want to call it that, was missing out on revenue, it’s hard to say. Like I say, I’m no economist. I’d say they missed out on quite a bit.

**Did you have things go missing yourself?**

- 35:30 A couple of times. I’ve got a photo there of a vehicle that runs on a generator, Land Rover wheels and some sort of chassis off something, but only a few bits and pieces because they couldn’t get into us anyway because we had razor wire six foot high and we had armed guards twenty-four hours a day. So it was pretty hard for anyone to sneak into our perimeter anyway. Except one occasion one was turned
- 36:00 to jelly on one occasion. That was after our time, he just pointed the rifle the wrong way and he got turned into jelly. That’s hearsay.

36:30 **You had quite a huge operation. Who was instrumental in helping you with your men? Who were you closest to in your operation?**

No one. I was on my own little Ray Malone. In regards to our regimental ops, I got very little help off them; it was a bit disappointing actually. They could have tried a little harder a little earlier. I did most the liaising on my own.

37:00 Then I involved Comms Troop commander, I involved him, because he was part and parcel anyway, come with me and we started from there. I could have got a lot more help than what was offered I tell you. It didn't faze me because I'm used to raising this sort of, or maintaining this type of service anyway.

37:30 I know how it operates inside out and this is how it works. Here's an SOP, if you can't follow an SOP you shouldn't be in the job anyway. So the only thing I found really disappointing because I wanted to stay behind a few weeks longer to do a handover of the whole system, "No, you're on the plane. Let them worry about it," were their words. See that's pathetic.

**Why was that important for you?**

38:00 Well I was quite proud of what I achieved and so was the rest of my team. For them to say that, you know, "You started with nothing, so can they." What a lot of crap.

**Whose decision was that?**

It went through my 2IC [Second in Command]. I wasn't real happy with his response either. What can you do but jump on the plane and go home and forget about it.

38:30 **Do things like that still come back to you every now and then?**

Oh yeah, it plagues me sometimes. What a lousy pack of pricks to do an act like that on you. I was proud of what I achieved, I tell you what, they're not real proud.

**Why do you say that?**

I don't think they got reported too well,

39:00 even though they got OAMs, don't know why, anyway. Without specifically naming names, unless I have to, I can say one stayed in country for good, borne out of his own indiscretions and so

39:30 tough luck.

**Was there warning about AIDS before you went over there?**

Oh yeah, it was rampant. Yeah. Before we left Australia, "Listen fellas don't dip the wick and don't go bareback," and all that sort of stuff. It scares you off anyway. They were in a world of their own, if they're not going play by the rules they can die by the rules as far as I'm concerned.

40:00 I have no remorse whatsoever.

**Were you proud of your team?**

Oh yeah.

**What about them?**

Because we backed each other up. We weren't afraid of chipping in as far as someone not feeling real well or needed a rest we'd say, "OK just disappear for a couple of days and someone will fill in for you." So we'd have a little secret little rotation system where someone can have a decent break, "Just don't be seen for a couple of days. Go and book into an air-conditioned hotel

40:30 if you can find one, if it's not booked out by UN personnel." We'd look after each other in that regard. Any trouble we'd back each other up to the hilt. Not much I can say about Regimental Ops, but that's how we looked after each other anyway. Like I said, we were in the hot seat and we performed very well. I can't say that very much for the other squadron that was at Battambang

41:00 because they spent half their time in Thai resorts. How they got away with that I'll...

## Tape 9

00:32 Make no secret of the fact that everyone was warned about all sorts of exotic diseases and AIDS and everything. Obviously a couple of people didn't and to the best of my knowledge there are still a couple still back in country.

**Australians?**

Yes.

**What did you know about them when you left?**

Very little. All that I know is that they contracted AIDS and they refused to come home. That's about as far as I know.

01:00 **What about the other nations' contingents, was AIDS a real problem with some of them in particular?**

The Poles, the Polish logistics battalion they had no scruples about themselves, they'd shag a dead black snake, to use the term roughly. That's only

01:30 hearsay and what you hear about the traps they weren't real discriminate, God knows how many of them contracted AIDS, it would've been horrendous.

**You used to go to Shanty Town yourself?**

Yeah, well to be quite honest as a part of, call it entertainment if you like, but we had a chief clerk who actually operated a brothel as a hobby he reckons.

02:00 One to himself I guess. We used to entertain ourselves due to the fact that it was the only place in town when things started to relax a bit and we could stay out a bit later; we could actually get a cold can of VB at twelve o'clock at night. So we used to sit out on a verandah and watch all the happenings going by. We found it quite amusing. My conscience

02:30 is clear, but we found it quite entertaining. We got a good, big laugh out of all the goings on.

**What specifically was so amusing?**

It's like watching a Vietnam War movie, you know, the brothels and all that sort of stuff. Just a couple of us used to go out of our way to drink a nice cold VB and watch all the drunks carry on, UN

03:00 idiots and the Poles were bloody unbelievable. Just a form of entertainment. We made sure that we had a taxi and not a cyclo to get home.

**Were the prostitutes local girls?**

Mainly Vietnamese, it was a bit of a no-no for Cambodian girls to have sex out of wedlock. I guess the majority of them were Vietnamese.

03:30 **As things were winding down for you and you were preparing to leave, how ready were you to leave?**

I was itching to go home, but I was prepared to stay back for a few extra weeks to do a handover to the rotation team, but I was told, "No, you're jumping on a plane. You had nothing when you got here, they can have nothing when they get here."

04:00 Didn't sound real professional to me. I was a little bit disappointed in that and I wanted to do a reasonable handover so I was a little disappointed in that regard. Didn't appear to be very professional.

**So whoever took your place would have no...?**

They would have had an SOP to go by, but that's it. How to go into the ins and outs and the nitty-gritty and how to provide the manning and whatever

04:30 remains to be seen.

**Did you have any sense of your time had been wasted?**

Yeah, to a degree. My team and I have a clear conscience. We did our job and probably a lot more, but we did a damned good job and we did what we were asked to do and a bit more. We are pretty proud of that.

05:00 Yeah we were quite happy.

**Can you tell us about coming home and what kind of homecoming you had?**

I was on the news, I was the first off the plane in Sydney, I was first off, don't you worry about that. I was on all the news, first off the gangplank. Couldn't wait to get on terra firma. Unfortunately we were public property for about forty-eight hours,

05:30 because they wanted to present us with medals and the media wanted a piece of us and all this sort of stuff and a day and a half later I was home.

**What sort of response did you get from the media and the public?**

It was mainly relatives of people that were going to get off at Sydney, but they were still public property for another forty-odd hours, so they couldn't go home with their relatives, they had to go to Randwick. They had

06:00 to parade the next day and the following day we flew home in the evening. My wife and kids were waiting for me at Tullamarine.

**Can you tell us about that?**

They all wanted us to hang around and chin wag with the press but I grabbed Lorraine's hand and said, "Let's go home." Damned glad I was.

06:30 **And the children, what was it like to see them again?**

Not that words can explain it, but damned glad to be home.

**So was the response from the media and public to what you had done, was it a positive response?**

Oh yeah.

**What were they saying?**

We didn't have bands playing or anything like that, I didn't say much

07:00 I kept going with my bag and my trolley, I was first off the plane I made sure of that and we didn't quite drink the plane dry but we come close.

**You said that they wanted to give you medals, what happened there?**

That was the following day. We had a bit of a parade and got our medals and that was it.

**So what were people in Australia saying about what you had done?**

We didn't see much of a crowd, we didn't hear much at all.

07:30 Except we got a bit of stuff in the local papers, I think the Herald had a daily update of us in Cambodia. I'm pretty sure it was the Herald and the Melbourne paper. Yeah, daily editorial on what was happening over there. A bit of a buzz for us. We got a fair bit of support, mainly in the press,

08:00 there were no bands playing or parades or anything like that. We got a warm enough reception when we got home.

**So what was your impression of what people in Australia thought of the peacekeeping in Cambodia?**

It was pretty good apparently, they got good media coverage, positive media coverage, all-in-all I think everyone was pretty happy with what Australia contributed to and

08:30 that's that.

**What did your kids think about what you had been doing?**

Pretty hard to explain to the kids, but I think they were just glad to have Dad home. Not too much was said. They just wanted to see what was in my suitcase.

**So how did you adjust to being back in Australia?**

09:00 Not too good. Oh no, just sort of withdrawn a bit. I got into the drinking a bit too much. I could best describe myself and Lorraine as one of the lucky ones, because we had something like a 70% divorce rate from the five hundred that initially went over. Can't speak for the rest, but all I can say is that I was one of the lucky ones.

**So a 70% divorce rate among the Australian...?**

09:30 The first of the five hundred. So like I say I can't speak for the rest; that was the divorce rate.

**Why do you think it had that impact?**

No idea. Can't really speak for anyone else, but a lot I suppose wives were left wide open, preyed upon, weaknesses,

10:00 mainly preyed upon. The weakness of the hubby being away for so long. That's a fair bet.

**In what sense did you have trouble adjusting?**

It wasn't only me. It was pretty hard to describe. People go

10:30 through different emotions and all that sort of stuff. Me I was withdrawn, went bush a couple of times to have a bit of time to myself. All-in-all scraped through and secured my last posting back to Townsville and all agreed that we'd settle in Townsville, put it to a vote to the family and all the kids said, "Townsville."

11:00 **Was that a good move?**

Yeah. We've settled down here and everyone's gone their separate ways. Two of the girls are still in uni and the kids are scattered around all over the place. Still very tight knit family.

**So what sort of lasting effects did your twelve months in Cambodia have on you?**

I tried to put it behind me actually.

11:30 Obviously you have, the effects of PTSD, not so much flashbacks, but nightmares, your hearing is shot, I take pills so that I can sleep, if I haven't got the pills I've got to drink to sleep, you know liquid green ones, have medical problems that plays on your mind. You bring back rashes

12:00 and disease back that are enduring. One is psoriasis I think it is. You feel for the guys that went to Vietnam and did it hard and even though I didn't go through half as much as they did, you can, I can take it on board anyway. I support them wholeheartedly.

12:30 **Why is your hearing shot?**

Gunfire, extended periods of time in aircraft, tinnitus is a big problem with me twenty-four seven [all the time], I've got to take bombs [sleeping pills] to sleep sometimes. Sometimes it's not as bad as others. Loss of hearing that creates other problems with selective hearing

13:00 if you know what I mean.

**What do you mean?**

Selective hearing I call it, but there is loss of hearing, creates friction in other ways. Generally you just kick on with what you've got.

**You said that you were among the lucky ones, in what sense did your time in Cambodia affect your personal relationship with your wife?**

13:30 Somewhat strained, but like I said, I still call myself one of the lucky ones. Quite happy and we love each other very much and it'll stay that way.

**You talk about PTSD, when were you diagnosed with that?**

When I first started seeing a shrink about ten year ago.

14:00 I didn't know what it was ten years ago. Anxiety attacks, bloody panic attacks, bloody as small as they may appear, creating friction between your partner and yourself, drinking, sometimes to excess, lately it's been quite good.

14:30 **That wasn't very long after you returned to Australia? Would that be right?**

Yeah. Just mood swings, anxiety attacks, attempted suicide, to mention an extreme, but that's how bad it can get.

15:00 **Are you able to tell us about that?**

Oh, not particularly. Just battling with my own demons within, for want of a better term. That's control, I'm happy with my life, my family, my wife at the moment and I want to keep it that way.

**So what sort of treatment did you receive for your condition?**

15:30 Just counselling. We got virtually none when we left country, a couple of shrinks come across from Australia and a group session, "Anyone got any problems?" "No." "See ya." That was it. That was our debrief and counselling. That was pathetic. No, that's basically it as far as I can recall.

16:00 **How did the counselling help you?**

That's through my shrink I suppose, my psychiatrist. I've got a vet [veteran] friendly psychiatrist here in town and he's very good. I'm on medication, I don't think I really need it any more, but he's a good leaning post to have close by in case I really needed to speak with someone other than my wife.

16:30 **You talked about nightmares, could you tell us about some of those?**

Few and far between, but it's always the same, you never can remember them. It could be nudging me in the back for snoring I don't know, it's mainly same old nothing in particular but it's all relating

17:00 back to Cambodia. I'm not saying that we were dodging bullets and dodging bombs every day we were there, it was nothing like that, but the scenarios we had to live through in my situation and what occurred and what we were looking out for and what could have happened, that sort of plays on your mind. Tiptoeing through a minefield for example.

17:30 A lot of what if situations, "What if?" "What if?" It comes back to you. I can imagine what the guys in Vietnam went through, God bless them, some of them don't even receive the recognition that they damn well deserve.

**Looking back on your time in Cambodia what was the strongest memory of your time there?**

Getting on the plane to come

18:00 home. I didn't even bother try and meet up with some old friends of mine who had just flown in and I was jumping on the same plane to fly out of the place. I didn't even bother. In fact I was the first on the plane. I was glad to see the last of the place. I don't think I'll ever go back either. That's about it.

18:30 **As a member of the peacekeeping forces, how do you view the way you and your colleagues have been treated on returning to Australia?**

For most a lot of us took our re-embarkation, post-embarkation leave or whatever you want to call it, virtually once you finish your leave you go back to your unit, that's it.

19:00 That's it. No follow up counselling, nothing. So there were people who did have problems, big problems whether they received counselling or wives had run off, or anything like that, we don't know.

**Have you heard about any of the people that were there in Cambodia who killed themselves?**

19:30 Can't recall. I know quite a few of them had a lot of problems, but whether they went that far I don't know.

**So you returned to your unit when you came back from Cambodia, what was your job when you got back to Australia?**

Transport supervisor, back at what used to be 2 Sig Regiment, now renamed LFSU, Land Force Signal Unit.

20:00 I was only there for eight months before I got posted to Townsville anyway.

**Here in Townsville, what was your job?**

Transport supervisor, 103 Signal Squadron.

**How did your difficulty in adjusting affect your work in any way?**

Not whatsoever. I did my penance trying to see the light and all that mumbo jumbo, but I got down to it and basically it didn't affect me.

20:30 I had a short temper, very short fuse, well there's a number of reasons why I have problems, may not be related to my service in Cambodia, but it's my inner demons, if you want to call it, creating my very short fuse.

21:00 It's something I should have had a long time ago, maybe for the better.

**Was there a particular incident or situation that caused you to seek help?**

I can't really put a finger on it,

21:30 but it could perhaps have something to do with my employment as a driving examiner with Queensland Transport, can be a highly stressful job. My old reaction to something like that would be, as a driving examiner, would be to combat

22:00 stress with stress. I spoke to a few people in regards to applying for pensions and my doctor referred me to a psychiatrist and he'd say, "Yep you've got it. A number of symptoms, definitely all show the signs of PTSD, chronic bowel syndrome, tinnitus,

22:30 reflux - so I've had all the machines poked into me at both ends and all the paperwork in and it didn't take long before I got my TPI pension. I left Queensland Transport.

**Since that time what have you been doing? How do you spend your time?**

I'm heavily involved in the four-wheel drive club, have a ball,

23:00 refurbishing the house, all that sort of stuff. Gardening. We're getting about; we're going to start travelling shortly. We're happy as Larry. I'm putting the rest of it behind me.

**I know it's difficult to talk about, and I know you are a bit reluctant to, because it's important for us to try to understand what you went through and get that on record, are you able to talk about some of those flashbacks?**

23:30 I can't, I've never been able to put specifics on it. It could be running through the jungle, I had a bad experience up in the northeastern part of the country where I stayed with this village for a couple of days. The first night, the next morning rather, I took one look at their shithouse and I

24:00 said, "No way am I going in there," and I went for a walk into the jungle with a roll of shit paper, I went through several mines, several booby traps, this is the Montagnards don't forget, and I found a nice comfortable tree with a view. Did my business and walked straight back out without touching nothing.

They're the ones who said, "Did you see any tigers when you come out?" So I've got a bit of a fetish about tigers now and things hanging out of trees with

- 24:30 pointy bits. They said don't wander off wherever you haven't been shown. Little things like that might niggle me every now and again. "A tiger just took out a goat yesterday." Like I said I can't really put specifics on an individual event. You have a lot of fire and kids screaming and stuff like that
- 25:00 I can't even put a finger on it. You can have a lot of yelling and all that sort of stuff, but that's only little snippets of what you can remember. Sometimes I wake up in a ball of sweat after walking through a daisy field or something like that. I don't know, it's pretty hard to describe. When you relate that to psychiatrists, "Yep there's another couple of
- 25:30 pills to take." Like I said, it's not fire, it's not bloody rifles going off, guns going off. You can't really put it down to specifics. I'll get up in the middle of the night and have a couple of beers, kick the dog and go back to bed again. It makes you feel better. I don't think anyone's the same,
- 26:00 like I'm in a lather of sweat now. Anyway. Like I said it's pretty hard to put specifics. I don't think I'll ever remember a nightmare, I don't think anyone does, except you wake up and write it down, that happened and that happened. It's pretty tough. It's more of the stress side of the mission we had plays a big part in what happened.

26:30 So there you are.

**Do you meet up with friends who were in Cambodia?**

Not any more. You don't see them.

**You used to?**

Every now and then you might get in contact with them. No one, I don't think anyone keeps in contact. It's best forgotten I think. It's a different kettle of fish; it's a different scenario that anyone's been on. Very few of them that I know of,

- 27:00 no association formed or reunions or anything like that. So I think it's best forgotten. We did a good job and leave it at that.

**Is your condition with PTSD something you can expect to get over?**

Who knows. I have no idea.

**What do the doctors say?**

Keep on your pills. Stay happy. Don't get angry. Just stay on your

- 27:30 medication until such time as you, whenever, anti-depressants and bombs to sleep that's about my extent apart from cholesterol, bombs and anti-depressants are my cup of tea at the moment.

**How much of a struggle is it on a day-to-day basis?**

- 28:00 Not really as long as I can keep occupied and my wife does a good job of that, I've always got something to do. If we can get out and about and do what we like doing, four-wheel driving and camping and prospecting as long as we can well we'll be right.

**You said it's better forgotten, if you had your time again would you go and do that?**

- 28:30 No. Nope. No. Never.

**Why not?**

No. Leave it to someone else. Did my time.

**Why do you feel that way?**

I wouldn't like to go and relive the

- 29:00 stress and destruction on myself again, maybe I went overboard as far as providing a decent service. But if I had better support from my superiors I'd do it again, but not under those circumstances I wouldn't ask it on an enemy.

**How much do you think that lack of support affected you?**

- 29:30 A lot. Quite a lot. It's just banging your head against a brick wall. You're asking to get out there and they don't let you get out there, only when they want you to get out there. When you do get out there, you get berated for not knowing what's going on the day you get there. That's why you feel like killing someone.

- 30:00 Not getting support from your superiors, because I don't think they even realised how big a mission it was going to take anyway, and not getting their support screwed me big time. These are the same

officers that are running our army at the moment. I'd be very, very careful.

**When you say, "Screwed you big time," do you mean mentally?**

30:30 Yeah to a degree, frustration, disappointment, all those terminologies. No I wouldn't like to go through that again. If it was run a bit more professionally, yeah it would be great, a big adventure.

**You'd had years in the army, masses of training before you went to Cambodia, how did the reality of that kind of situation compare with what you'd been?**

31:00 Just slotted in. There wasn't any great surprise except for the heat, even though I'd trained in Townsville for years and years and years, the climate is not all that different except for the heat and combination of humidity it knocks you about. The actual job itself didn't surprise me not one iota. I knew what was going to happen. These so called officers

31:30 with their own agendas wouldn't follow through. These same sort of officers are now being caught out in this investigation that's going on within the government at the moment.

**So you must have some view on that?**

Oh yeah. Why get coaxed by the Defence Commander on how to release material during an investigation. This is the type of scenario, the

32:00 same mentality that were seen with senior officers in Cambodia. You know, like it surprises me and it come out at my medical tribunal that I had to front, you know, that they found no records of UNTAC whatsoever, the Department of Defence, no records were kept except for one diary by Colonel Stoddard. No records at all.

32:30 Work that one out.

**UNTAC being the**

United Nations Transitional Authority to Cambodia, the Australian contingent. No records kept. No accountability for all the money that went over in suitcases.

**What are your thoughts on that?**

It sucks. It's ridiculous. They got away with murder; I'd like to know where half the money went. But

33:00 anyway that's only hearsay, but I tell you what if the Department of Defence doesn't have any records at all, or any records kept during that time in Cambodia, I'd be asking questions. I only found that out purely by an investigation undertaken on me by the Department of Veteran Affairs while I was fronting a medical tribunal.

33:30 They can't find any records kept by Australian contingent. I think that's pathetic. That sort of describes the early part of the actual mission. The ineptness. But anyway, that could be all hearsay too. There's no records kept, where are they?

34:00 **Are you a religious person?**

I have my own faith. I don't practice.

**Was that important to you while you were in Cambodia?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**How so?**

Just I can't even think of the word now. My own sense of being I suppose, it's hard to describe, my own,

34:30 can't think of the word now, but that's just my thing. Religion got belted into me while I was a kid and even though I may have my faith I don't practice it. I go out of my way to not practice it, much to the disgust of my mother. I have my own faith and I'll keep it that way.

35:00 **Were there times in Cambodia where you prayed?**

No. Oh just personal thoughts maybe that's about it. That's about it.

**Not having any special association for the people that went to Cambodia do you think, what are your thoughts about that?**

Well everyone's virtually

35:30 lost contact with each other because they've just splintered back out to their own units and their different corps around Australia, and back to New Zealand. It sort of fractured once we got home. Everyone went on leave, I took long service leave and leave and embarkation leave and whatever I could lay my hands on. I had three months off and went back to my unit. I think I was asked by the old RSM whether I



36:00 would like to be the Secretary of a Cambodian Association. I told him where to go. They were my sentiments exactly and I haven't heard anything else.

**Why was that?**

I resented him asking me, that's why, that's all. No one as far as I know keeps in touch. There may be a few friendships made along the way, but I had a lot of friends over there anyway,

36:30 we keep in touch, but that's about it.

**Is Anzac Day important for you?**

To me it is, yes. I may not march every year, but I do the Dawn Service at least whether it's here in Townsville or Ravenswood out west.

**Why do you think it's important?**

Well it is for me. Just to have a few quiet thoughts and have a million rums.

37:00 That's what Anzac Day is all about, a bit of reflection and then a drink with a few mates. And damned right it should be a public holiday.

**To what extent do you think it's important for all Australians to remember?**

It should be a national icon for starters; it's part of nationhood as a country on its own. I don't

37:30 believe, even if we do go for a republic, which I hope they do, I'd still like to see our flag retained, an awful lot of people died for that flag.

**Chris, do you have a final word that you'd like to say to all Australians or about anything related to your experience?**

I can't speak for the rest of the fellas that were there in Cambodia,

38:00 I can't speak on behalf of some of the fellas who I support who went to Vietnam, but I'm getting to see now what they went through, what I'm going through now. I missed out by a bee's dick going to Vietnam and I wanted to go. Like I said, I can see where they're coming from now and people who went to Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq,

38:30 I just hope that people with any sort of condition, at least, give them a fair go and recognise some of those conditions and look up to our returned servicemen.

**Are you concerned about the situation in Iraq?**

I think Australia went in there with all the wrong intentions, purely political

39:00 by the little screamer. It's a good idea that they did go in, but I think it's for all the wrong reasons, by political agendas and oil. I'd say bring them home.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**