

# Australians at War Film Archive

## John Jewell - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 23rd April 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1819>

### Tape 1

00:35 **Okay, I'll get you to start off with the overview that we've talked about. So take me through from where you were born, where you grew up and continuing on?**

Right, I was born in Leura, New South Wales in 1933. Lived there and my father was a sign writer for one of the local theatres and my mother died when I was around about probably six and I went from family to

01:00 family and I've been in orphanages. I went to the Boys' Town, which was the Church of England Boys' Hostel and from there I went to live with my father and my stepmother in Fredrickson in New South Wales and from there to Narabeen in Sydney and from there I went and worked on farms. I left school when I was fourteen and went and worked on farms. Came back and stayed around there for a while.

01:30 Age sixteen, roughly, joined the army and virtually that's it for what you want now.

**Well just tell sort of take me through your army life basically?**

Army life, well I joined at age sixteen. I did a magnificent job of forgery and the highlight of the effort was I walked into the Marrickville Depot in Sydney along with a lot of other people to be pre-issued with

02:00 clothing to go for recruit training and that sort of thing and a voice said to me "What the hell do you think you are doing here?" And I looked up to see my father and he said "Mmh" and I said "What's it look like?" And he said "That's what you want, you go for it". So I went from there to Greta in Singleton. Pretty hard training in those days because it was just after the war and they did nice things to you if you didn't do things properly. They had a happy little habit of making you run up a

02:30 hill called Molly Morgan and they'd give you an old kerosene lantern and they'd light it and make sure you had no matches on you and send you up the top of the hill, and if it went out you had to come all the way down and get it lit again. So if you did manage to get to the top and it was alight they'd send you back up. And if it went out half way down you'd come down and get it lit again. Those were the sorts of lives you had in those days. Bed consisted of a Hessian bag full of straw called a palliasse. All your clothes

03:00 there was no washing machines or anything like that was done by hand and hand and etcetera and etcetera. Do you want me to continue on with?

**Just take me through I guess in really brief detail the different places, like you did for me earlier that you've been involved in, in the army, the different units and sections?**

The different units, well my first lot in the army of course I found out it looked like I was going to go on draft to BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] in Japan and my step-mother dobbed me off, so they threw me out on my neck.

03:30 And I went to the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority and worked there for a while, came back, worked up round where I was born in Katoomba, on transport and I worked on the railway, places like that, pea-way gangs, mostly all very hard work. Came back to Sydney and thought "Well I'll have another lash at the army" and I joined with permission this time and went into, did the normal old thing, virtually when they first opened

04:00 Wagga camp, and the K Force people were going in and out of there. I was posted regular army not K Force, so I went from there to North Head in Sydney, did my recruit training there. Stayed there as, on school as a driver and tried to get out of it actually. I wanted to go to Korea because a lot of non-corps postings were on in those days but they wouldn't let me go. Finally did my NCO's [non commissioned officers] course and got two stripes and they sent me

04:30 to a 1AGRA [Army Group Royal Artillery] Group at Georges Heights and from there I went to four or five different units after that, including 13th National Service Battalion, from 13 National Service Battalion I went to 1 Field Regiment at Holsworthy. From there I went to Malaya and from Malaya to 1 Field

Regiment here in Wacol in Queensland. From there I went to another CMF [Citizens Militia Force] unit in at Annerley, 11 Field Regiment and from there I saw that the Vietnam thing was on and a

05:00 lot of my friends went to aviation and I had been involved in that when I was at the School of Artillery when they used to do the Aero-P flights, training Aero-P pilots on the old Austers. So being interested in aviation I applied for that. At that stage in time I was downgraded to a home only posting because I was medically unfit, so I went and saw my boss and I said "Can I get to Vietnam?" And he said "If you can get through Canungra, you can go."

05:30 So I went to Canungra and I got through and here's one for Veteran's Affairs, I was on twenty percent disability pension when I went to Vietnam and came home. Came home and they posted me to a job as Admin WO, warrant officer that is, to 163 Recce [reconnaissance] Flight, which is virtually a transit flight, no aircraft. We just transferred people in and out to Vietnam and other postings. Jim Campbell, incidentally, who was my boss in that particular outfit is now

06:00 the chief test pilot for the Westpac helicopters here in Queensland. They promised me a particular job in aviation and they posted somebody into it and they wouldn't change is so I told the army I didn't love them any more and I applied for a discharge and got out.

**Just take me through briefly some of the detail of what you were doing in Vietnam?**

In Vietnam I went over as a Sergeant Airfield Defence and that was a job that didn't exist in that particular time, so they put me into air traffic control.

06:30 That involved an early warning system for aircraft flying to artillery. Our job was people would call us up and people would ask us where artillery was firing from one point to another, so we used to give them a grid reference and keep our fingers crossed that they didn't hit anything as they went through. That included all aircraft that went. The other part of our job was, personally I used to go and sit on the bottom of a jeep down at Luscombe Field with

07:00 a pair of goggles on and a remote microphone and bring the selections and doing insertions for operations and stuff like that. Other odd times were programmed to go as an observer with the odd pilot and I did that job and very unofficially I flew several times with the Americans and got some terrible frights. That's basically it and then I came home from there.

07:30 **And after you left the army?**

After I left the army, at one stage while I was still in the army I was tangled up with some friends of mine who were in the transport game and having been a trade training testing officer in transport, that's another job I had in the army. I was always interested in transport so I did that for a while and decided there was no money on the interstate scene so I came in and became a freight hauling sub-contractor for TNT for about eighteen years. After that I sold out and went to Bribie Island and sat around for a while doing nothing.

08:00 I bought a tipper and that didn't work out too well and then I decided that after talking to an ex-army friend of mine, who was making memorabilia such as plaques, badges for the army, stuff like that, and I went and bought a machine to make all these castings for him, which you can see around the room here now. Had a bit of a bad fracas with him and a bad marriage break-up and then I went for the first time

08:30 in my life working for a boss in Brisbane, driving trucks there for about three years and I met my present wife who was in the catering game and I went [into] catering. And in between times I had the Redcliffe Indoor Cricket Centre, so I was a very busy man.

**Sounds like it. Well we'll go right back to the beginning now and what memories do you have of your Mum before she died?**

09:00 Very, very little. She apparently died from peritonitis and I remember she was very sick and there was a nurse there. They didn't know much about it in those days and apparently she was applying hot compresses to her, which was the worst thing she could have done and she ultimately died. I'll always remember a very childhood one where I was swallowed an elastic band and she sat on my chest and dug it out of my mouth, just one of those things that comes back to you as you're a kid. Other memories

09:30 I remember she took me up to the Kingsford Smith Park in Katoomba which has got a replica aircraft and so forth. It's in a big bowl and just across the road from the railway station. That's basically all I remember of her and as I said I was farmed out with families and went to homes and all sorts of things.

**Where did you go straight after she died?**

I went up with my grandmother in a place called Parkes in New South Wales and then I went to an auntie and from there I went to Galvin Home, which was an orphanage.

10:00 I don't think anybody wanted me, quite frankly as I was a bit of a rebel.

**Do you remember many details around the time when she died?**

Very little, very little. I remember I got a smacked bum once because it was snowing and I put some ice in a pot and put it on the stove and forgot all about it. Not some ice, some snow and I was only very young and I thought "I'll warm the snow up", and I got a flogging for

10:30 that one. No, I don't remember very much about it.

**Did you have any siblings?**

Children of my own?

**No, brothers and sisters?**

Oh I've got a brother, yes. He lives in Sydney somewhere. Haven't seen him for about four years.

**How did you get along as kids?**

We didn't, mainly because my brother was always, you do find it in families where one child is always the favourite sort of thing and he was the bloke. I don't know who he lived with, to be quite frankly

11:00 at that time.

**How often did you see each other when you were young?**

I saw him when I went back with my father. He was in the army of course and after he got out he was at Frederickton in New South Wales and I went to school with him there for a while but he was a bit of a sook, so I had to rescue him a few times.

**And what do you remember of your Dad before he**

11:30 **went away?**

Not a lot of my Dad, see it was 1933 and I was about six, it was about 38 or 39 and he very shortly joined the army and that was sort of why I was put from pillar and post and I never much saw him until after the war. I remember seeing him once after he joined and he came home and he was very proud because the army gave him a set of false teeth. That's the sort of thing that sticks in your mind.

12:00 **What did he do during the war?**

My father was a technical fellow on radar. He didn't know anything about it but typical army they taught him a lot when he went in there and that's basically all he did as far as I know. He didn't go overseas because he was medically unfit. He had a wonky eye and a very, very clever sign writer. His father, he told me, they used to do sign writing on the old horse and carts and most of the older people have seen them,

12:30 the bakers, the milkers and the milkman and everybody used to have beautifully sign written horse carts and his father was a hard man. My grandmother reckoned I was like his father and he would do a beautiful job. He'd do gold leaf on horse and carts, absolutely magnificent work and they do them on computer now of course but he'd say to his father "Well how's that Dad?" "Not good enough" and he'd run a chisel through it. "Do it again." That's what they did in the old days.

13:00 **And what are your memories of spending time with your grandmother?**

Not a terrible lot. We lived in Parkes, wasn't there for very long. I lived with an auntie of mine who had quite a number of children and mainly with her before I went into the Church of England Boys Home. She had a heap of kids and I didn't like her because my father sent me a big thing of [fire] crackers for Guy Fawkes Day or whatever you want to call it,

13:30 cracker night, and she didn't give them to me. She shared them up amongst her kids and no, I didn't like her very much.

**What were the living arrangements like with her?**

Oh it was quite alright. We had our own room and that sort of thing but I didn't get on with her son. I used to give him a smack in the mouth every now and again because he was one of those people that used to dob me in for things that I never did and I wasn't too happy with that.

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

Oh he just used to lie about things that he'd done himself and

14:00 told her that I did it and "my charming little son wouldn't do that" and the first chance that I got I give him a fat lip and she decided that I wasn't a good person to have living in her home so that's when I went to the Church of England Boys Hostel.

**Well what was Dubbo like before you?**

Dubbo? In that time there was a big army camp outside Dubbo in that time. That was in the forties, early forties and that was the

14:30 passing through point. All the convoys used to go through there to Darwin. They used to go by road up to Darwin and it was a huge camp, just out, I think it was out where the zoo is in Dubbo now. But I don't remember much. You used to see them wandering around town and having the odd fight, like the

Australian Army do today.

**What sort of memories do you have of hearing news of what was happening in the war?**

Well typical kids. We used to get out and go "bang, bang, bang"

- 15:00 at each other and say "I'm a Russian and you're a German and I'm shooting" and stuff like that but yeah, we did hear about it but being kids you didn't take a hell of a lot of notice of it. But I was still in Dubbo when the war in Europe finished. That's right because I pinched a kid's bike and I rode round and round the town with some tin cans running out behind me.

**Well what did it mean for you that the war had finished for you?**

- 15:30 Not a terrible lot as I was only twelve or thirteen or something when it happened and it didn't mean a terrible lot to me, like kids today. Although kids of today are a bit more up with things than we were in those days but we used to go down the road to the river bank and they used to have Chinese market gardens down there and we used to go down there and pinch a few vegetables and that, just for a lark. That sort of thing.
- 16:00 I'll always remember one flood that came through and wiped out all the Chinese market gardens down there and it was very interesting to see all the carrots and cabbages all going past under the Dubbo bridge, just memories that come back to you.

**What sort of memories do you have of the way that the war was affecting everyday life in Dubbo?**

Oh I remember the special tickets for getting fuel and things like that, tickets for certain types of food, tobacco and cigarettes and

- 16:30 that sort of stuff. I remember all that sort of thing, not that it worried me because I wasn't short of food. No, we used to get up to the normal sort of things that kids did. Just recently in the paper actually they were talking about a plague of locusts, grasshoppers out that way and I remember I was in one of those, when one of those came through and they had to close off the line and they ate everything in sight and we used to get our tennis racquets and get stuck into them with a tennis racquet. The things kids do.

**What would you do to them?**

- 17:00 (demonstrates), yeah, that was good fun.

**Did your Dad come visit you in Dubbo?**

No. No, I never saw him again until he remarried. My stepmother was a nurse and I went to Frederickton, as I said, in New South Wales. We used to go down, in Frederickton, my stepmother's parents were Scots

- 17:30 and he was a cranky old coot and I always laugh at him. We'd get on a bus and go into Kempsey and walk home from Kempsey down the middle of the road with a bottle of Scotch in one hand and "get thee gone, get thee gone" drunk as a skunk in the middle of the road. We used to go down to the cheese factory in Frederickton as kids and get a bit of cheese cloth that they put around the cheese
- 18:00 and dredge along and get prawns and put them on a shovel and go into the boiler and cook the prawns on the fire in the boiler. And the highlight of the things that used to happen in Fredericktown there was a steamship, a small steamship called the Arakune. There was a lot of dairy around in those days and it used to pull into the wharf at Fredricktown and load all the cheese for the cheese factory and that was the highlight of everybody's day. And one of the things that was very interesting in those days too,
- 18:30 there was a hotel as you came through from Kempsey on the right hand side, there's a hotel in Kempsey and a man there had a zoo and he had monkeys and pheasants and lyre birds and all sorts of stuff in there in those days and it was really something, so that's my highlights of Kempsey. So I moved from Kempsey to, we went from there to Manly in Sydney, only for a very short time and then moved to, my grandmother had a house in Narrabeen in
- 19:00 Sydney and we moved down there. And then around about the time that I mentioned to you, they still had Italian prisoners of war here and merry old fellows they were and they had Bren gun carriers running around the beach at Narrabeen, Curl-Curl and all up round that way where they'd had barbed wire fences. So they had the Italians all dressed in their Australian Army uniform, dyed red or a pinky colour with Bren gun carriers tearing up all the barbed wire.

- 19:30 **Would you talk to them?**

I don't remember that I ever did, no. I think we were frightened of them, I'm not sure.

**How long after the end of the war was this?**

Oh 1945, say 46 or somewhere like this. I'm not putting an absolute date on it. It's a long time ago.

**Just going back a little bit more, what was the main decision for you to go from**

20:00 **Dubbo into the boys' home?**

It wasn't my decision I can assure you. No, I think they thought I was a bit of a wild character. I was known to be like that I'm told.

**Had you done anything else apart from beat your cousin up?**

I didn't beat him up. I just gave him a smack in the ear occasionally. No, nothing really but I was always a bit of a detractor and I had ideas of my

20:30 own and my wife tells me I've never changed.

**Would you get into any trouble around Dubbo?**

No, not really.

**So there was no major...**

No, no criminal activities or anything of that nature, just did the normal things that kids did in those days. Not like today where they think kicking the guts out of telephone booths is a way of doing fun but we never thought of doing things like that.

**Who told you that you were going to be going to this home?**

21:00 Oh I don't remember. I just arrived there. It took a bit of getting used too. You had to fend for yourself.

**What was it like?**

The home bully decided he didn't like me and they used to do open hand boxing but he hit me with his hand closed so I dropped him. I didn't have any more trouble with him.

**What's open hand boxing?**

Well you box but you keep your hands open, instead of closing your fists and that was a thing kids did in those days.

21:30 So he closed his fists and he hurt me so I gave him a good one and he had a loose tooth. I didn't have any more trouble with him or anybody else for that matter.

**Well describe what the set up of this place was like?**

It was run by the Church of England in Dubbo. Mainly it was for the sons of out of town

22:00 cockies and people like that, used to send them in there to go to school. It was pretty basic. One thing I did get to hate was plum and melon jam and lemon jam because that's what you got on the table all the time and the old nun was a real pa.

**What was she like?**

Well not a nun, she was a nurse actually and she was in charge of the home and she had her favourites, like normal but the priest himself I liked him. He had an aviary down behind the back of the rectory and where the home itself was and I used to go down and have a talk to him and help

22:30 him with his birdcages and stuff like that.

**What would you chat to him about?**

Nothing I remember to be quite frank but I liked him. He was a nice old bloke.

**What kind of birds did he have?**

Quail, finches, silver irons, all the normal old stuff that people used to keep in those days. It was as big as this room and you could get right inside and I used to help him get in there and clean them out and

23:00 that sort of stuff.

**And what were the boys like in the home generally?**

They ranged from about my age, which was at that stage about eleven to twelve years of age up to about sixteen years of age. Some were going to primary school, some were going to high school, that sort of thing. Used to spend a lot of time, there's a huge war memorial in Parkes, in Dubbo, and used to go over, it was a beautiful park and there was a good swimming pool there and in those days they never let the dark skinned gentlemen swim in it but we used to go to

23:30 that one and they had a very big sports oval. One of my favourites was to race people round and round the, long distance running sort of thing. I didn't get beaten very often. And in the centre of the park itself they had a, like a huge lake with ducks and all sorts and I believe it's all still there and they used to have in those days, which people I suppose would laugh now, the local band used to get there and play in the band stand so you'd sit and listen to that.

24:00 Quite a good life for kids in those days.

**And what was, you mentioned that there was quite a few age ranges in the home, was there a kind of hierarchy amongst the boys?**

They seemed to stay in their own age groups, no-one seemed to worry much really what was going on. If you got a dirty kid in there they did the same thing in the army, they'd scrub him down with a bloody real stiff broom under

24:30 a cold shower and sort him out until he got himself clean and that was how things worked in those days and I saw it happen in the army too. You couldn't do that today.

**And you mentioned this bully, was there any other kind of bullying that went on?**

Not that I ever saw, nobody worried me after that.

**What would a typical day in the home be like?**

Oh you'd be up about probably

25:00 half past six in the morning, showered, clean your teeth, get dressed, make your own bed, make sure your locker was nice and tidy, go for breakfast, off to school, back and we used to play a little bit of tennis ball cricket in the backyard, that sort of thing, when we came home, evening meal, bed. Pretty Spartan [basic] sort of a place.

25:30 **How did it compare to life with your aunt?**

Oh I never sort of worried much about it. I just took things as they come. After having going through an orphanage in Boys' Town, that was a bit tough too, then you go to the hostel, well you get used to institutional life for want of a better word.

**When had you been at the orphanage?**

26:00 Just shortly after my mother died.

**Before you went to your grandmother's?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Tell me about this place?**

I don't remember terribly much about it. I didn't particularly like it. Being pretty young I was probably homesick and that sort of thing. I do remember one thing that happened as a kid, there's a chip out of my teeth there and I was drinking out of a bubbler, and a kid hit me on the back of the head and that knocked that chip off.

26:30 **Who ran this orphanage that you were in?**

I have absolutely no idea, Dellwood Homes it was called. It was up in the north side of Sydney. The old Boys' Town used to be in Sutherland but that was a pretty Spartan life, you had to feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] and bring the cows in and stuff like that. It was all good stuff for kids as far as I'm concerned, because I've been a country kid anyhow, so what the hell!

27:00 **And you went from the orphanage to your grandmother's, is that right?**

Yes.

**Why did they decide to take you out of the orphanage?**

No idea, just one of those things that happened along the line. Well do kids worry about those sort of things? You normally don't get told do you, you just go. And Boys' Town I wasn't there very long and then I went to my auntie's

27:30 place and then I went from my auntie's place to the Church of England Boys' Hostel

**Well what was Boys' Town like at the time?**

It was pretty rugged compared to what it is today. They were all just like army huts, similar sort of thing and you were all in long dormitories and you all had your own duties to do every day, stuff like that. All good discipline, something that kids don't get today.

**What kind of duties?**

Feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, bring the cows in, make your own bed, all those sorts of things that kids don't do

28:00 today.

**What were the people who ran Boys' Town like?**

They were all, I don't remember much about it to be truthful. I never got into any trouble there. I just

did what I was told and no problems what so ever.

**What about the boys at Boys' Town?**

There was a rough element there but if you sort of stuck where you were you didn't have any worries with them. No, I had more trouble in the Church of England

28:30 Boys' Hostel than I had there, but that was no problem at all. I wasn't there all that long but long enough to, it didn't worry me.

**At Boys' Town or at the hostel, when you'd go to school was there any sort of stigma attached to being in?**

Not that I ever saw, no, no. No, we used to, in Dubbo anyway we used to have our little gangs running around and we'd have a go at the Catholics and they'd have a go

29:00 at us Protestants and stuff like that but there was no blood shed. "Catholic dogs sitting on logs" and all that sort of stuff they used to carry on with, normal stuff that kids do.

**And you have no idea where your brother was when you were in the hostel?**

No, I don't remember where he was to be quite truthful. I do remember living in Neutral Bay for a short time and that was with an auntie. It was very

29:30 vague that one and I was with an auntie for a very, very short time and I was there when the Japanese submarines came in, with all the banging and clanging going on but I didn't remember very much about it but we all shot down into the air raid shelters when it happened.

**Well take me through your memories of this night?**

Well that's virtually all I remember of it. To me I thought "that's a lot of noise". "Come on, we've got to get down the air raid shelter" so we went down the air raid shelter and all the

30:00 banging and searchlights stopped so we got out again and went back to bed.

**What do you remember hearing the next morning?**

That the Japanese submarines had come in. I do remember going across, yes in the Manly ferry. For some reason or another we used to go across there. I don't remember what that was all about but when you went across on the Manly ferry you went across the Heads and over near Rushcutter's Bay there they used to have booms across there and they used to pull the booms back and the

30:30 ferries went in and they pulled the booms back and that's how the submarines got in anyway. They went in under the boom and they sunk a ship called the [HMAS] Kuttatubul and sixteen navy blokes were killed.

**During this time when you were moving from place to place, who was organising?**

I have no idea. I just went where I was told to go. I suppose it was my grandmother and my aunties and whatever. I had an auntie that lived at Kings Cross at that time.

31:00 I don't know what she did. Her husband was a professional gambler and that's all he did for a life. In the Cross [Kings Cross] anything goes, even back in those days and I vaguely remember going to see her in this huge building. To me as a country boy, go up in the lift and "Are you going to get to the top?" And "Are you going to get to the bottom in one piece when you went down in it?" Because I had never been in one before, things like that just came to you.

**And did your aunt from Dubbo come and visit you when you were in the hostel?**

No, no, I used to go and visit them occasionally but they didn't especially make me welcome so I used to go back. I used to just go for a wander around town for something to do, that sort of thing. I was pretty much a loner anyway.

**Did you feel lonely?**

No, I always found something to do, go down to the Abo [Aboriginal] camp down under the railway bridge

32:00 and have a talk to the Abo kids and stuff like that.

**What were they living like?**

Oh pretty rough, but they were all good people, no, they were good people. Went to school with Abo's up there and never had any trouble with them, oh indigenous people, sorry.

**What sort of things interested you at the time?**

I don't think I really had much of an interest, no, used

32:30 to just wander, I've always read, I always read books, always, all my life.

**Did you have many books available to you?**

Oh yeah, there was a bit of a library in the hostel and I seem to remember you could borrow some from the school at times but the big problem with schools in those days was you had one teacher and they were doubled up with classes, something like thirty five, forty kids in the one classroom and you didn't get much of an education out of it. We weren't particularly worried about it anyway.

33:00 **Did you enjoy it, enjoy learning it?**

Yeah, the only thing I didn't have any fun with was maths and I still don't. Thank god for the adding machines, but for the rest, history, geography, all the rest, I didn't have any problems but by the time I turned fourteen, as I mentioned earlier on, I'd had enough of school anyway. The day I turned fourteen I said goodbye and gone and I

33:30 went to, my father sent me there I think from memory, I went to an outfit called "Boys on Farms" in Sydney and they used to just send boys out on farms and I went out to a place called The Rock in New South Wales on a farm there and I worked with a farmer there. He was a subcontractor and he used to dig dams with draught horses with a single malleable plough and a roll over scoop.

34:00 The roll over scoop had a handle on it and you used to fill it up and sit on it so it would go across the dirt and if you hit a stump and it would fly up and if you didn't move in a hurray it would knock your head off. I loved the horses, they were great and then I had a (UNCLEAR) for a while.

**Who came to get you from the hostel?**

I think I was put on a train and sent to Sydney, yes, I was.

**Who met you in Sydney?**

34:30 My father, yes, my father met me in Sydney and then I went from there to Frederickton and then he shortly moved from there to Arabine.

**What was it like living with your father after such a long time?**

Quite an education actually. My Dad he was a pretty casual sort of a bloke. He used to do house painting and he came home one day, I was old enough, I started driving

35:00 a motor car when I was fourteen and motor bikes and all sorts of stuff and come home to me one day and said "I've bought myself a motorbike and sidecar" and I said "You've done what?" He said "I've bought myself a motorbike and sidecar". I said "What is it?" He said "It's an old Indian Scout", a huge big bike with a big box on it. I said "What did you buy that for?" He said "Well I needed something to cart all my paint around in", he was house painting. He could do anything, a very clever man. I said "Yeah." He said "You're going to teach me to drive

35:30 it" and I said "What?" Anyway I went and picked this old thing up and it was a beautiful old bike and it had been up on blocks right throughout the war, it was about a 1928, '29 model or something like that, so I got him started. And I'll always remember we went out through Mona Vale, do you know where Mona Vale is in Sydney? On the old road and down where all the glass houses used to be down in the bottom of the hollow there and there were blackberry bushes all over the place, growing up the side of the road and

36:00 he lost control of it and we ploughed into all the blackberry bushes. Oh my god father. I'm in this box and I dived for cover on the floor and I looked up at the old boy and he looked like he was going to bleed to death from all the blackberry bushes and we had a lot of fun trying to get that bike out of there I can tell you. But he used to always go to the hotel at night and I reckon that bike used to come home on radar.

**Who had taught you how to drive?**

Some friends of mine who used to live up at Elanora, do you know where Elanora is?

36:30 Used to live in an old house just off from the Elanora Golf Links as it was in those days. I think Monash is up there too and we used to muck around on bikes and they were a bit older than I was we used to have a lot of fun on bikes and yeah, that's where I learnt to ride bikes.

37:00 I have still got all the scars to prove it.

**And when you went to live with your Dad, your brother?**

He came living with us there too but I didn't have much to do with him, even then. He used to sort of muck around with his poofy [soft] mates and mine were a pretty rough bunch that I used to muck around with and we used to go out on the Narabeen Lakes on boats and stuff like that. We always had plenty to do, go surfing

37:30 and it was a pretty good life.

**You mentioned that your brother needed rescuing a few times? What?**



Well he wouldn't stick up for himself, he had the bullies so I fixed a few of them up and he didn't have any more trouble after that. I got expelled from that school, it was a one teacher school in Frederickton. I was going to school one morning and I saw this tail sticking out from underneath and I thought it was a snake

38:00 so I give it a clout and it turned out to be a blue tongued lizard but you don't know at the time. So I fronted up to school the next morning and the school teacher decided he was going to make an example of me because I had killed a poor, defenceless blue tongued lizard. And I thought "Well I haven't done anything wrong. I just reacted very quickly." So he took a swipe at me with the stick which I grabbed and broke it across my knee, kicked him where it hurt most, and walked away and never went back.

38:30 **Was that the end of your schooling?**

No, no, because we moved from there to Sydney then.

**Where did you go after you'd been kicked out of this school? Did you move straightaway?**

We moved very shortly to Narabeen in Sydney, yeah.

**Did you ever have any, like did you get into trouble from your Dad for doing things like this?**

Only once. He accused me of something I hadn't done too and he came at me with the poker

39:00 so I decided that was fair game and I was a fair lump of a kid at the time, in fact I was about as you see there, and I took the poker off him and threw it up into a ball and said "Righto, if you want to have a go, let's see how you go with your dukes." I didn't have any more trouble with my father after that.

**Did you have more of a sort of man to man relationship after that?**

Not really, not really,

39:30 because as you can imagine I never saw much of my father. He was in the army through the war most of the time and it was virtually after the war that I got tied up with him and then it was three years down the track and I went in the army and I had been up the bush and done my own thing and all that sort of thing. Actually I got a job working on a dairy farm at Bay View in Sydney, that was before I left school. I used

40:00 to wag it a bit and pretty cold out round that way and you used to have to go out and milk the cows, go and bring them in, that was all hand milked and you'd go out and get the cows and it was pretty, no boots on of course and there was a lot of frost on the ground so when a cow dropped a big poo you jumped in it and got your feet warm and washed them off before you went in the bales. So you'd milk the cows and hook the cart up and then go and deliver the milk.

## Tape 2

00:36 **On the last tape I noticed you were talking to Naomi [interviewer] about being able to fight a bit?**

No, I can't fight. I don't worry too much about fighting unless someone puts a hand on me then look out.

**Where did you learn it as a kid that's all?**

You had to when you were young, you go through boys' orphanages and you've got to stick up for yourself, you've got no family have you? It's a

01:00 pretty normal sort of thing. You don't stick up for yourself no-one else will. Our society today I'm afraid as I see it, don't do it.

**Sorry?**

They don't sort of do it, they don't get the, well they don't get to move around as I did as a young person.

**And so you'd learn how to fight in the orphanages?**

Well just defend yourself, I won't say fight.

**Were they rough places?**

01:30 Some of them were yeah, not to a great extent. If you sort of kept out of peoples way you never got into any trouble but if somebody brought it to me I give it back to them, that's the only difference. You never go looking for anything like that, I still don't, not to this day.

**Were there some of the kids which were abusive in those places?**

Not particularly because usually for instance Boys' Town Orphanage, because they were only little

fellows, you would

- 02:00 get the normal things that young kids do but as you get a bit older you would find that the discipline with the people who ran the place pulled that up very quickly, very quickly.

**What about the people running the place? Were any of them like abusive or?**

No, no, they were mostly all Catholic brothers and all that sort of thing, Boys' Town being Catholic of course and I think, I don't know but I'd say some of them were just employees etcetera,

- 02:30 the farm hands and stuff like that but you don't know, the way they dress how could you tell? No, no, the discipline was firm but fair as I found it.

**Was there much of an opportunity growing up in these kind of circumstances to do what other kids did like play and?**

Well you just made your own thing. Kids in my day used to go down to the creek and make an old boat out of a bit of galvanised iron or something like that. It used to sink and wouldn't go too well

- 03:00 but you had a lot of fun. When I lived in Narabeen, one of the tricks we used to do to stir the fire brigade up there was a bit of bush down on the creek that ran through the place so we used to sneak in there and set that on fire occasionally but kids do that today anyway. One of our big things, there used to be a huge hill leading up to Elanora Golf Links, off Wobarra Road, Garden Street

- 03:30 I think it was called and we used to build billy carts and come down that and how we didn't get killed I'll never know. You'd never try it today because there wasn't a lot of traffic in those days but oh we used to get up to quite a speed and if you crashed, you really crashed. We used to do that sort of thing but we never used to damage other people's property or anything like that.

- 04:00 **You also said to Naomi you'd go down and hang around with the Aboriginals, where at Dubbo?**

Yeah.

**Yeah, what were your impressions of how they were incorporated into society in general?**

Well as kids you never sort of worried about it. You just did things that kids do, used to wander up and down the riverbank and

- 04:30 might have a mud ball fight or something like that, just the normal things that kids do. Dive take all your clothes off and dive in the river for a while and pull them back on while they are still wet and you'd keep going. No, we assimilated quite well with them. We never had any trouble with them.

**What about the people in town? Would they talk about the Aboriginals on the outskirts or?**

Not that I ever noticed because well once again as kids you sort of weren't worried about it. You just mucked around with the kids that were there and you didn't worry about

- 05:00 anybody else. You'd quite often see the odd drunk staggering around, the Abo's staggering around the place, drunk and stuff like that and you'd just walk around them but they didn't seem to worry anybody much. But they weren't in a situation like they are today.

**Were they treated equally in your opinion as a kid?**

Yeah, in the schools yeah not a trouble, no worries whatever, no, never had any trouble with them at all, no. They probably weren't quite as well dressed as we

- 05:30 were but nobody worried, nobody wore boots to school in those days anyway.

**I know you mentioned it but I was interested in these Italians locked up, describe how they looked?**

No, well they were happy go lucky blokes. They were singing and sit down and have a feed and they had army blokes with there with them of course but we just sort of took it as part of what was going on because up on the hill

- 06:00 behind Narrabeen there, there was all gun emplacements and stuff like that and we used to get up there and play in them too. They had gun pits and I think they had a three point seven right on top of the hill at one stage of the game. That's an anti-aircraft gun but no, apart from that we never worried about it. We used to stand and watch them and "oh yeah, okay" and we'd go for a swim in the lake or something but you didn't seem to worry about them. What was there to worry you?

- 06:30 **What was their kind of demeanour like in their faces and?**

Oh laughing and smiling. They were happy to be out of the war mostly. A lot of them came back here and became market gardeners and incidentally in that sort of thing while I was in Narrabeen I got to know the Italian kids. They had a lot of Italian market gardeners up around the top of Elanora Heights, up around those areas in those days and Norman Ellos are the one's I always think of. We used to get up there as kids and work on the tomatoes and so forth on weekends just for something to do and they

ultimately moved from there and they had a place called Dom's, a huge place

07:00 over in Ryde, in Sydney for many, many years. They had a big fruit and vegetable shop I think from memory, but no, we were all similar, all kids worked in together, it wasn't any problem.

**And I was just interested, you mentioned your brother was a bit of a sook, why was he a sook?**

Don't know, why do kids go that way? He was just like that. I think mainly because he was the sort of favourite one in the family

07:30 and that happens as you know. He's always been the same for my, he's a completely different person to me, I'll put it that way. He's the complete reverse of me. He joined the air force and decided he didn't like that after about six months because he was missing his fiancée and so he applied for a discharge and got out, that sort of person. He was always one of those kids that always seemed to land on their feet without even trying. He got a job working in a

08:00 garage, repairing motor cars and so forth and to the best of my knowledge he never qualified as a mechanic but he got a job with the NRMA [National Roads and Motorists Association] in Sydney and stayed there for about thirty eight years. And so he was one of those people, everything just seemed to fall at his feet. His relatives won the State Lottery in Sydney at one stage. They won twelve thousand pounds and that was a lot of money in those days and they bought him a block

08:30 of ground and build a house on it for him at Harbord. Do you know where Harbord Services Club is? About eight or ten houses down from that so you can imagine what that grounds worth and to the best of my knowledge he never paid it back and that's the sort of person he was.

**How did you keep up with the news of your brother over the years as you were out of contact with him?**

Didn't worry about it, didn't worry about it.

**Were you curious at all to?**

No.

09:00 **Why not?**

Well we just didn't get on together. I think the last time I saw my brother was in 1981 when my father died. He was living up in Dubbo with his sister and that's the last time I heard of him.

**We were talking about some of the work you were doing, what was the first job that you did and how old were you?**

The first actual job I did was, living at Narrabeen

09:30 and I got a bit of a job delivering telegrams for the local post office. I got five shillings a week, as a kid. And it wasn't long after that I left school anyway and I got a job working for the Warringa Shire Council as it was called in those days and it was on old Gardener Street which used to lead down into Mona Vale and they used to put roads down like they do in third world countries in those days. Used to come in and put all the rocks in by hand,

10:00 the big rocks, and you'd spread them all out on the ground and then they'd bring more rocks in and put them on top and you used to get what they called a napping hammer, and you'd go all and put the toe of your boot on the rock and smash it all up so that it goes down into the others and then they'd put gravel over the top and tarred it or whatever. I can tell you this much, it will last ten times longer than the roads they put down today. I got five pound a week for that, ten quid, ten dollars, that was pretty good money in those days.

10:30 But it wasn't long after that when I, yeah, I joined the army then.

**Okay well tell us why did you want to join the army? Where did the interest come from?**

I have always been interested in it and I think possibly from listening to news broadcasts during the war, I was always interested in it. I think possibly that's where the rub off came from and a few of the young fellows that I knew had gone and

11:00 joined the army and I thought "I'll have a go at this" and I did.

**Well tell us about that news broadcast from the war years, what are your memories of?**

Well I remember they used to broadcast casualty records and stuff like that from New Guinea and the Middle East and stuff like that and I think just as kids were concerned we used to sort of

11:30 form a, I'm a Russian fighting Germans or something and we'd sort of get on sides and throw rocks at each other or something like that. It's pretty hard to explain but no, I was always interested in it and I still am today.

**What about the war's end? What are your memories of the celebrations?**

The war's end as I told you I was riding a pushbike around Dubbo dragging some tin cans around and that was about the last I sort of...

12:00 One of the things that upset me quite a bit was, I was living at Narrabeen, when they started bringing the Japanese prisoners of war home and that upset me a bit to see some of those blokes because a couple of families in the area we were in the kids I knocked around with their fathers were prisoners of war and they were very badly knocked about and I wasn't particularly impressed with that. And of course after having gone across there at a later date and seeing what the Japs did I didn't like them

12:30 and I still don't.

**What about your father? Was he an influence?**

In relation to that? Army wise? No, no, no, to my Dad it was just a job I think. He had to go although I've got an inkling that I think my Dad volunteered but due to his physical condition he couldn't get overseas. He served in Townsville and I think he served in Darwin too but that was all he did and then came back. Then he

13:00 got out and then I ran into him when I joined as I explained earlier.

**Well was that when you first joined. Tell us about the first time?**

The first time I went in, yeah, no, he was at Marrickville. Yeah, he rejoined after the war and he went to Moorebank Workshops and stayed there as a coach painter, come sign writer sort of thing,

13:30 right up until, when did he get out? 1961 I think he got out. The old fellow he had a stroke. I was overseas then. He had a stroke and he said to everybody "I've got leave, I'm going on leave" and nobody sort of took much notice of him and he just disappeared but he wasn't on leave at all. He'd had a stroke and he didn't know what was going on and they found him in the

14:00 Salvation Army Home in Sydney and they discharged him then.

**Well tell us about the first time when you joined up when you were underage, tell us the story behind that?**

Well as I explained earlier on I went to Marrickville and I ran into the old boy and there was a bloke called Flango Watson if I remember rightly was in charge of Marrickville in those days. And what they used to do was just line you up and give you an early sort of set of clothes to

14:30 go and do your training and we went from there to Greta where they put us through the normal infantry type training and you run up the hill with the lamp of course if you misbehaved yourself and sometimes even if you didn't. And you used to go for route marches around the back of Molly Morgan Hill with a Vickers machine gun over your shoulder or the tripod that held it, which was all pretty heavy, pretty hard work.

15:00 They got us out in the middle of a paddock and got us to dig holes and then they said "You're going to get attacked by tanks tonight" so they ran Bren gun carriers over the top of us while we were down the hole, stuff like that.

**Was this when you were under age?**

Yeah.

**When you first joined up?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Tell us the story behind that? I know you told us briefly but tell us the story of getting into the army under age?**

I just did a beautiful forgery on a birth certificate and

15:30 my parents' permission. I told them I was eighteen of course and virtually that's all it was. But the bloke that took them off me looked at them and looked at me and didn't say anything and just put it in the files and I think he knew damn well I was underage and he didn't worry about it. But a lot happened like that, right through the war years was the same way. I was in a unit in Brisbane with a bloke and he joined at fifteen and a half and went to New Guinea,

16:00 so it wasn't as if it was a thing that didn't happen. It happened quite a lot.

**How old were you?**

I'd just turned sixteen.

**What was it like a sixteen year old being amongst?**

It didn't worry me see because as I said I'd been in a semi-institutionalised sort of set-up since my mother died, orphanage, Boys' Town, boys' hostel, so it didn't worry me at all. It did some people

- 16:30 but it didn't worry me as I was used to being told what to do and did things for yourself. But I always remember when we were in Greta if you, they used to have a huge big picture theatre there and you'd go in there and we'd all sit on the floor to watch a movie and all the hierarchy would sit on chairs behind us and there'd be provo's [military police] on all the doors. I don't know what that was for and if you wanted to iron your clothes you had to go to the Everyman's Hut and borrow an iron
- 17:00 and what we used to do, you're normal khaki drill stuff you used to boil it up in a copper and stick it out on a big table and scrub it with a scrubbing brush and Sunlight soap and that sort of thing and dry it out. The other uniform you used to try and make yourself look like an old Digger [veteran], the old Second [World] War ones. They were all woolly so you used to get a razor and shave them so they looked like they'd been well worn and that sort of thing. And to keep the crease in those you'd
- 17:30 turn it inside out and run a bar of soap down where the crease was and then you'd run it back the other way and then do it with a damp cloth and then iron it again with the brown paper and you'd have a nice crease, you could have a shave on that. I can show you one of those uniforms. I've got one in there and that sort of thing and they had a place called Plonky Joe's, just across from the Greta camp and to get
- 18:00 to it you had to go across this fairly wide sort of a creek and sober it was pretty good. You'd go across on the pipe and then they used to drink this rocket fuel that old Plonky Joe got from somewhere and on the way back, half the time you'd fall in the bloody creek if you weren't very careful. Just one of the highlights and we went from there to Glenfield and then from Glenfield to old Holsworthly.
- 18:30 It was just during the coal strike in 1948. They put the army in up in the Singleton, Newcastle area there and they put out more coal in three months than the wharfies put out in the, the coal miners put out in three years I think. They wrecked a lot of equipment doing it but they did it and I went to 17/18 Infantry Battalion on staff there for a while and it wasn't long after that that I got slung out.

19:00 No, that was in '49 that I got thrown out, yeah.

**Tell us about this coal mining work?**

No, I didn't go on that, no. I wouldn't mind it and they had blokes up there driving trucks that had never driven a truck before in their life and they made a hell of a mess but they got to learn to use the equipment and they put a hell of a stock pile of coal out and the coal miners' strike failed, didn't it?

**And tell us, your basic**

19:30 **training, for a start, how did you take to this? What was that like?**

That didn't worry me, no. Some of the things that they used to get you to do were a bit daunting. Attacking over barbed wire, I always remember that one. I've still got all the scars on my arms now. What you used to have to do is run forward on barbed wire and you'd put your rifle in front of you and throw yourself down on the wire and

20:00 the next guy would run over you with his foot in the middle of your back and he'd throw himself down and if there was enough room everybody ran over the top of you. That was just a drill they did and then later on in later years, I don't know if the Australian Army ever got them, I know the Yanks [Americans] had them, they had a gadget called a Bangalore Torpedo. It was a long tube about that round and you could screw them together and you used to just run them up through under the wire and you could set them off

20:30 and it would blow the wire away. A much better idea than laying on the ground and people running over the top of you but we never saw them.

**And how were you taking to the discipline?**

Didn't worry me, didn't worry me. I'm afraid the age group is a lot different to what it is to people today. A lot of young people don't take to discipline,

21:00 I think as you well know but in my age group it never worried you in those days. All the Second World War blokes are the same, you never worried about it. You had the odd detractor of course but he usually wound up in the slot and when he came out and wasn't a good boy he got thrown in again.

**And were you taken to, how did you work out after the basic training what kind of area and what kind of corps you would be in?**

Well I was in the infantry

21:30 and I basically only went to those three camps over a period of time. You did your normally duties like dixie bashing and cleaning up around the camp and all that sort of thing, it all sort of went with it and I wound up, they put me on a NCO course at this battalion place at Chatswood in Sydney. I think it was just to give us something to do and they said "Anybody who wants to can become full time CMF and can go to

22:00 BCOF" and that was when my mother found out about it. I might have been lucky because I might have finished up in the 3rd Battalion and the first lot into Korea.

**How did she find out in the end?**

I never found out to this day how she found out. I might have even told her. I wasn't very impressed. I wanted to go along with the rest

22:30 of them.

**How did they tell you the news?**

Oh they just came and said "We've found about, we've had a complaint, we've been informed by your step-mother so we'll have to dispense with your services." I said "Hang on, another six months and I'll be eighteen anyway." I was sorry about that.

**Well did you say anything to her? Did you get to talk to her about it?**

No, never worried about it. I came home for a short time and went to the Snowy Mountains Hydro

23:00 Electric Authority and worked down there.

**How did you come to get involved with this?**

The Snowy Mountains? Well another mate of mine, another bloke by the name of Arthur Dollay and we decided, it was his idea and he said "Why don't we go down and get a job on the Snowy?" And I said "Well how do we do that?" And he said "Well we'll have to get a train down to Cooma and decide on where we go from there." Anyway we did that and

23:30 went to Cooma and made a bit of an inquiry around the place and nobody could tell us much so then we got a lift out to a place called Adaminaby which is under about fifty or sixty foot of water in a dam and I stayed there overnight and we had a couple of beers in the local pub. Nowhere to sleep of course so across the road is a road that went to Jindabyne so we went across and slept in the long grass there and a

24:00 bloke said "Don't worry about it, just start walking to Jindabyne and someone will pick you up." Never saw a car all day and it's forty eight miles to Jindabyne so we hiked the whole distance to Jindabyne and a bloke said to me "Oh the supply truck will be going out to Island Bend, should be through about midday". He said "Thumb a lift on that", so we climbed on the back of that and we went out and fronted the hierarchy at Island Bend and asked them

24:30 for a job and they were sort of amazed "Why didn't you apply in Sydney?" We said "We didn't know you could do that." So anyway they put us on and we worked timber cutting, huge trees with axes and no chainsaws in those days and anyway they pulled us off that and I was with, there is photographs there somewhere, and I was with a Polish bloke and they had us digging

25:00 post holes up on the side of the road. What they used to do you'd camp on this, I've got photographs there I can show you, in these tents and if you, you paid X amount of money fortnightly for your rations. There was a local kitchen run by the, I think they were Greeks or something and they'd give you a cut lunch to take to work with you sort of thing because we used to go quite a far way out all the time and they'd take you out by truck and bring you back sort of thing.

25:30 Anyway if you were close enough in there was a truck that used to come from point A to point B and pick you up and you could have lunch back in camp so we walked up and we were standing on the side of the road and this bloke, Van Hootten, a Dutchman, came along and he said "What are you doing standing there?" And we said "We are waiting on the truck back" and he said "You are five minutes early, you are both sacked." I said "Thanks very much for that." Anyway we went back to camp and a bloke came down and saw us about three hours later. I can't think what

26:00 his name was. He was a PMG [Postmaster General] bloke. He was the foreman of the PMG gang so I got a job with, he said "Would you like a job with us?" And he had heard what happened and we went up and we started putting telephone lines through, so I stuck at that for quite some time and then decided "No, I've had enough of this" so I went back, jumped the train and bought the first suit I ever owned in my life in Cooma. And went through to Sydney on the train and then I went

26:30 up to Katoomba. I thought "I'll go to Katoomba" as I'd lived there, I was born there virtually and Leura and got a job working on the railways on the construction gang. There is a place called Woodford on the way up the Mountains and we built a huge concrete retaining wall by hand, wheeling barrows of, and we built that. And that finished and I shifted onto a perway gang, putting sleepers and new rails and stuff like

27:00 that in and worked up through the Zig-Zag tunnels in Lithgow and oh it was cold and that was when I decided well I think there's a better life. Oh I got a dose of appendicitis that's right and I couldn't work and I was lucky that I ran into a woman up there that had known my father so she took me in for a couple of weeks. And then I decided well, oh I got notification, the first of the National Service things in the early Fifties and they wanted me to go into National Service. I said "No,

27:30 go to hell. I'm joining the army again" so that's when I joined the army.

**Got a couple of more questions about the Snowy Mountains Scheme, how much were you earning in those jobs?**

Mainly about fifty quid a fortnight in those days.

**And what was the life like down there?**

Oh pretty rugged, pretty rugged. We were living in tents and they had a huge big community mess hall.

- 28:00 I think there's a photograph of it there and what they used to do, it was pretty damn cold, what they used to do is they used to lift the whole end of this building up, there was a big chimney in it, and they used to lift it up with a block and tackle and a bulldozer would push a big log in and that was the fire in there. So you could get a beer, you could walk to the Kosciusko Hotel, this is before it got burnt down and you
- 28:30 could walk to the Kosi [Kosciusko] Hotel and get a beer if you wanted to but most times is what we used to do is you'd buy Richmond Tiger beer and it used to come in like a cement bag, and all the bottles of beer had a straw sheath over them, a dozen bottles in a bag and we used to buy them. There is a bit of a story to that. That's why I barrack for Richmond Football team now, Aussie Rules, that's another story, so that's what

- 29:00 we used to have to do in those days.

**So this was your time off, like when you weren't working?**

Oh no, it was delivered to you and just keep it in your tent. You didn't need refrigeration, it was too damn cold anyway. There used to be a lot of fights break out because just about every nationality on God's earth was down there in those days. There was mad Irishmen and Poles and Czechoslovakians and Russians and you name it but just after I

- 29:30 left there they started bringing the call girls in in caravans and there was a lot of gambling and so forth went on and they had a bit of a riot because the coppers [police] came in and tried to close it down but that was after I left.

**Well were there many women there?**

No, none at all.

**What was that like, being at a place?**

You've just got to accept it haven't you? It's the same as in the army, if you're out in the bush there is no women, in some ways it's a god send, wink, wink.

- 30:00 **Was there any people that you particularly got along with? Any nationalities that you seemed to bond with?**

Actually I ran into a Pommy [English] bloke down there. He was working in the Snowy Mountains. I always remember him. He was a terrific bloke. He joined the English Navy at age sixteen, as they used to in those days, and he'd been badly knocked around. He'd got blown up in a submarine

- 30:30 and he was a cripple in one arm. He used to drive a bulldozer and he was one bloke I got on really well with down there plus the other blokes that I went with, the other one fellow that I went down with but no, you sort of didn't worry. You couldn't talk to half of them anyway.

**How would you communicate with people who couldn't speak English?**

Well you sort of didn't worry about it. You moved around in your own group and you were up early and gone early and back pretty

- 31:00 late so you played cards or something like that but you didn't have much time to do anything really.

**Would you have any days off or time off?**

No, we didn't bother with it, not while I was there anyway although some people used to have Sundays off occasionally. A lot of them us to go panning for gold, that sort of thing but there was a lot of fool's gold there so they didn't get a lot of gold out of it and some used to go fishing of course, for trout because

- 31:30 the river ran straight through Island Bend. They'd go fishing with a hand line with a grasshopper or something on the end of it and strictly illegal but nobody worried about it. We had to dig the cook out of there once. He disappeared, he had a great habit of drinking the essence they cooked with and they fished him out of the river about a week later.

**Did he die?**

- 32:00 He got drunk and fell in. Yeah, yeah, he used to drink vanilla essence I think they used to drink in those days, lemon essence because it was highly alcohol. You can't buy it like that now.

**Were there many deaths there?**

Not in the area I worked in, no, no, I never heard of any. He was the only bloke I ever heard of and that was self inflicted but in the Jindabyne tunnels they lost a few but they were virtually only just starting

that

32:30 when I went there.

**And what did the area look like where you camped? Where was it set up and?**

Oh it was set up in a basin, in an area that was called Island Bend and they just dozed it all flat and they had two huts, one you ate in and one was a rec hut and there is pictures in that thing somewhere and they used to build these wooden frames with a tent on the top of it, sort of thing and you had those old Vulcan

33:00 kerosene heaters that would gas you and that's about all you'd have plus your blankets and so forth and they had those fold up steel stretchers, old army ones they were, like the mesh you have on a fence and just a steel frame with two legs and folded out. What a lot of us used to do to make more room you'd get some timber from somewhere and put one down the bottom and a bunk up the top and it would give you a bit more room in your tent.

**How many were in a tent?**

33:30 Two. They were about a fourteen or fourteen ten or something with a door on it. Used to build a door in it, that sort of thing.

**How cold could it get in there?**

Bloody cold. But a lot of cases when you got really snowed in the only way they could get anything in was with bulldozers. They used to bring it in from the main drag, drag it on a sled behind the bulldozer

34:00 to get it in but that didn't happen often.

**Was it hard to work in snow, really snowy conditions?**

Yeah, one of the jobs I had wasn't real flash. They used to do hammer and tap. If you couldn't get into a place with a jackhammer you'd start off with a small drill, yay round and a bloke would hit it with a sledge hammer and you'd keep pouring water down the hole and it keeps going down, down, down, and then you'd get a bigger one until you'd get down as far as they wanted and they'd put plugs of geli [gelignite]

34:30 down and blow it. That was hard work and very cold on the hands too but I was a bit lucky. I got there pretty much towards the end of the winter and it was starting to warm up a bit so it wasn't too bad.

**And what were you noticing? I mean you mentioned every nation there but what were you noticing about some of the habits you hadn't seen before growing up yourself?**

Oh I don't think I ever worried about it. You sort of did your own thing and did your own business. Some of the eating habits were a bit rough,

35:00 a loaf of bread under the arm and carve it off with the knife and a big lump of sausage but most times they just ate of the mess the same as we did. Refrigeration wasn't too good in those days and sometimes you'd sit down to eat a meal of stew and you'd push the maggots to one side and just eat it.

**And would you ever talk to them about their stories of what they'd been through?**

35:30 For the main part they didn't want to talk and like they just stuck to themselves the way the migrants used to do in those days. They just stuck in their own little groups and we never worried about them and they didn't worry about us. But mainly any fights I ever saw were usually amongst the ethnic groups, not Australians or English or whatever. They'd be out with the knife and they'd get into it but mainly nobody got hurt much.

36:00 **Were there any groups which particularly clashed with each other?**

Well with the language barrier you didn't understand which ones they were anyway but the Poles were pretty mad. The Poles were especially, they are mad. There was no Germans there of course, not that I ever saw anyway. There used to be Poles and Yugoslavs and Latvians and Spanish and English and Canadians and Americans,

36:30 you name it, they were all there.

**Why were the Poles particularly mad?**

It's just their nature. Ask a German who fought against them in the Middle East. The bloke I was talking to you about he told me about them and the Germans didn't like the Poles. They marched in on Poland, just for starters so I think that's probably and a lot of those Latvian groups and some

37:00 of those others fought on the German side too and that could have something to do with it. The way they talked you couldn't understand what they were talking about anyway.

**And so tell us now after this job you worked on the railways and you re-enlisted, tell us about going back into the army?**



Yes I went to,

- 37:30 where did I go? Rushcutter's Bay, you know where the old stadium used to be? I joined there and once again wound up out at Marrickville and from there they tossed us on a train and from there we went to Wagga and that's when they were still in the throes of building that recruiting camp there, in the area we were in. There were a lot of the old war time huts were still there
- 38:00 and we went into those, the igloo type huts and they were still building a lot further up on the hill. Most of our instructors were, I got on well with them, some were Korean and most of them were ex-Second World War, a few English. We had a bloke called Corporal Hawkey there and he was a funny sort of a bloke. But no, half the time when they found out my background I used to finish up as an assistant instructor anyway so
- 38:30 I got an easy time of it. No, the training was pretty much the same as what it was when I first joined and then you finished that and then over from where we were they had the Special K Force camps, the Korean blokes, and they all joined specifically to go to Korea and they had their own, they had two battalions over there I think, nearly two battalion strength and they all trained away from
- 39:00 where we were because we were in the regular army side of things. Didn't have much to do with them but occasionally they used to grab you to do town picket because as you can imagine Wagga turned really into an army town. You'd go in there when they were on leave and there'd be hundreds of them running around. There was a place called the Coconut Grove, there was always trouble there. It was a dance hall and they'd rub a few of the locals up and stuff like that and we used to go and picket. We used to wear a bayonet and with our RP [regimental police] arm band on and
- 39:30 we used to just disappear into a hotel somewhere around the back and have a few beers and let them go, let the provo's do it and I wasn't going to get my head kicked in so we just let them go at it, that was quite easy. And then we finished our training of course and that was in winter too. By God that was cold there and troop trained into Sydney and
- 40:00 they got a bit rough on us there. You'd get on the train and you used to get your kit bag with all the stuff in it and they'd go along and they had a big long lump of wood and they'd belt your kit bag to make sure you didn't have any grog [alcohol] on the train.

## Tape 3

- 00:39 I remember when we got on the train to go to Sydney after the finish of our group training course the train was chock a block full with K Force fellows as well as ourselves and the provos used to go along and hit all the kit bags with a big stick to make sure that there was no grog got on the train, which was a hopeless thing
- 01:00 of course. If they put it right in the middle it wouldn't get hurt anyway and anyway that was okay and they were all the old dog box type ones with the doors all opening along the side and we got through to Goulburn and the train stopped in Goulburn, freezing cold, so everybody is wearing their great coats so they got the water bottles out of the train. You know the water bottles they have? And three and four would line up and get two rums and one bloke would have one of these under his great coat and they would walk over and tip them in and
- 01:30 go back and get another two with the result of course that everybody was drinking rum with water out of the train. They had a hell of a headache the next morning in Sydney but the funny part, but not funny, but dangerous part of it was that people were getting out of the train while it was going along, at sixty, seventy mile an hour, and walking along the outside going from one carriage to the other and nobody got hurt, fortunately. But they had a lot of trouble getting that train going again in Goulburn Station. It was like the old

- 02:00 war time troop trains so, very similar actually, not much difference when you think about it. And anyway we got to Sydney and got picked up and I went to North Head.

**Well you mentioned to Kiernan [interviewer] that because of your previous stint with the army you were helping the instructors?**

Yeah.

**What kind of things were you doing?**

Oh just normal foot drill and stuff like that, that's all. Just give them a hand with that, just go around and make sure the blokes were holding the rifle properly, stuff like that, nothing very exacting.

- 02:30 On weapon training and stuff like that well we didn't get into that. We had to just get in with the rest, and it was just not very much. We did help them but it was enough because in those days, as I said, with the K Force they had a hell of a lot of instructors over there and over where we were in the regular army side of things they were a bit low on instructors and just in odd times they used to, we'd just give them a hand.

## **And what were the other**

### **03:00 sort of recruits or other men in that training like?**

Oh most of them were straight off the street. There were a few ex-Diggers there but not many but they mainly fell into the same category as we did, just give the instructors a bit of a hand. No, but training was pretty much the same as what I did initially.

### **And in that training did they decide what corps you'd go into or?**

No, they give you a choice normally

### **03:30 and what they were doing in those days they were very low on armoured corps so they were trying to get people to join armoured corps and as I explained to your friend a while ago there was no way in the world they were going to get me into that. And due to the fact that I came from Sydney I thought that I didn't feel like going back to infantry as that entailed a lot of walking. I thought "now if I get into artillery I can ride" so I applied for artillery and I went to North Head, in Sydney, Manly.**

### **So what's the camp at North Head like?**

The camp at North Head

### **04:00 was built in the early 1930's and it was absolute luxury to what normal army life was and it was even back in those, absolute beautiful barracks. It is now a museum. I don't know if you know that or not? It is a museum now. You can go through it and go and have a look through it and that sort of thing. No, it was very, very good. Very tough though, in relation discipline was high and we had to polish the floors, everything that was brass you polished, all**

### **04:30 the brass you wore you polished. Fire extinguishers outside, everything was polished. They used to go around with a pair of white gloves and see if there was any dust on the windowsills, that sort of thing. Can you imagine the troops of today putting up with that? They'd all mutiny. Anyway we did all that sort of thing and my course was on Bofor gun, anti-aircraft guns and I did that course and passed it and then I was posted as a driver.**

### **Well tell me**

### **05:00 about the course?**

Well it's an anti-aircraft, it's like a big machinegun really. It's got a clip of four rounds in it and it's poked down through the top of the gun and you do certain drills to make the gun fire virtually, that's what it's all about. One of the things they did there if you didn't do things quick enough or you were a bit slack one end of the gun had a gadget called an EDC, an engine draft connector,

### **05:30 and all it was was two wheels with a bar out the front with a ring on the front of it that hooked onto the truck, so if you played up you got the job of pulling that around the parade ground by yourself. You didn't back up for that one, it's pretty heavy that thing especially in some places they used to have the guns, there is a lot of sand at North Head and they'd have the guns on hard standing and around the outside was the sand so you'd have to drag it through the sand.**

### **And what sort of things did they take you through in terms of firing the guns?**

### **06:00 They used to send an aircraft over dragging what they called a drogue behind it and you used to shoot at the drogue.**

### **Well tell me a bit about the Bofor guns? What are they?**

It's a forty millimetre light anti-aircraft gun. They use them a lot on the naval ships as well and sometimes they are in multiples but the ones we had was just the normal mechanical one. They were used right throughout the Second World War. It's a case of you have two layers, one

### **06:30 either side, one for vertical, one for horizontal and it's got an aiming ring around it and you've got graduated rings on it and you aim off in relation to what the estimated speed of the aircraft is through those sights. And then you have another bloke who stands up and the magazine is right in front of him, it's a curved sort of thing, like a Bren gun and they have ammunition numbers and all they do is bring the ammunition to this bloke and he drops them down the hole and at the same time he stamps on a lever on the floor and that fires the gun and hopefully**

### **07:00 you shoot somebody down. If he's the wrong bloke, that is. I went onto three point sevens on latter days and the three point seven was a heavy anti-aircraft gun which fires at great heights and there used to be a bloke called Lionel Van Praag who was a racing driver in Sydney, a motor bike fellow and he used to go under contract to the**

### **07:30 Australian Army to tow the drogues. And one of the things they used to do, the three point seven is aimed and operated off a radar set, the setting on the radar set and it swings the gun around and all you've got to do is feed it, put the rounds on a tray and it goes down and another gadget comes down and pushes it up into the gun but as you go past you hit a thing called a "pig's ear" and that fires the gun. And this Lionel Van Praag he was**

- 08:00 renowned for carting a blue cattle dog in his aircraft and whenever it landed the dog went looking for a fight but anyway, that's another story. But anyway he was flying one one day and apparently they had a metal tow line off the aircraft back to the drogue and instead of, the drogue itself has got metal segments in it so the radar can fix on it and somehow the radar moved and it started running up the metal
- 08:30 wire, so he dropped it and shot through. He said "Enough of this you blokes, I'm pulling this thing, not pushing it" and they nearly shot him down but that's just one of those stories that happens with anti-aircraft fire.

**And what sort of teams do you work on around a Bofor gun?**

A Bofor gun, from memory I think it's six men, two layers, the bloke that fires it and the ammunition numbers, they feed the ammunition to the man on the gun

- 09:00 but the one thing you've got to watch with the Bofor gun is that when the cartridge cases are ejected they come out through the back so you've got to make sure you don't get one in the shin when they come flying out the back.

**Where is it loaded from?**

Up the top. They give the rounds, four rounds in a clip and you just drop it down into the gun and they just feed down, as you press it they just keep going down. The biggest problem you've got, especially when you're training blokes on them

- 09:30 is to stop them from looking at the target and not watch where they're feeding the rounds. They forget to do it and the gun stops firing because there is no ammunition in there.

**How often would they hit the drogue?**

Oh quite often, quite often, yeah.

**Any accidents?**

Never saw one, the only thing you can get is a hang fire. If the gun is firing and the round doesn't go off so what you've got to do then is they've got a ram rod which is, you can unscrew it

- 10:00 and it bends at the top and what you've got to do is you put the barrel down horizontal and you give the job to someone you don't like and he's got to go up the front and bang on it and push the round back out the back because the thing you've got to watch with the Bofor gun is they've got a set up or a set back on it. And when it fires it arms itself out from the gun and if it happens to get a fair sort of a jolt it could set itself but I have never known

- 10:30 it to happen. The same thing happens with the twenty five pounder.

**And how long did you spend training on the Bofor gun?**

That was a three month course.

**And how much of it was hands on and how much was?**

Oh you're training on it all the time until such time as you get to shoot the weapon and then once you've finished that that's your core training finished and you're posted out to a unit.

- 11:00 There wasn't, from memory I don't think we had any light anti-aircraft units at that time but you had to do gunnery, you had field gunnery and anti-aircraft gunnery.

**What was the field gunnery?**

Field gunnery was the twenty five pounders normally and that was that one you can see in the picture there.

**Well tell me about how that one works?**

Twenty five pounder is what they call a separated round and

- 11:30 the round itself is, one man, the breech is open and one man hold it and you've got a ram rod like so and the bloke stands off behind the back of the layer and he just pushed it up. It's got a copper band, or bronze actually, around the outside of the ram and the rifling in the barrel when it goes up they jam in that copper. Then they have a brass cartridge case

- 12:00 normally with a gadget called a becket in it and inside that are different bags of cordite which denotes how far you are going to shoot the gun. That's all governed by the elevation and how far the target is away etcetera, etcetera but normally in most training situations you'd take what is called the "blue bag" out. Take the gadget called the becket out and take the blue bag out and toss it to the bloke behind you and put it back in and then you put it in with your fist closed like that

- 12:30 and the other bloke slams the breech shut, because if you don't do that it will chop your fingers off and then you fire it.

### **And what's the targeting system?**

Actually it's pretty involved but it's a case of on a twenty five pounder you aim behind you to shoot in front. That tossed you didn't it? What it amounts too is you have what you call a survey party and they actually do a survey and they do a survey on the map. When they go in they know roughly where the target is that they're going to the shoot

13:00 at or the rough area so what they do is the gun itself, just there is the sight and behind it they have like a surveyor's theodolite. Now he aims at a certain area and calls out a grid reference out to these people which they set on there and what they do is they have a GAP1, a gun aiming point, one and two.

13:30 One is a long distance one and one is a close one and what happens there is that you aim on that reference that they give you you set that on there and then you move your gun around onto your gun aiming point. Now all the guns do the same thing which means they are all pointing in the same direction and that's basically what it is. So every time you get a

14:00 shift in range or lateral movement, every time you move it you move it off that gun aiming point behind you, so to get the gun to aim where you want it to point you've got to move the gun around and lay it back on that gun aiming point, which brings the barrel around. Clear as mud?

### **What happens if you're for example in the jungle or in, and you can't? When the surveyors are lining it up**

14:30 **and they can't actually see through trees or terrain?**

Well you use a big mirror, big long mirror like that and about that wide and it's got graduations on it and you set it up on a stand, like a theodolite and instead of using a gun aiming point you aim, you get your sights and you aim on the mirror so you aim on yourself, right? You can see yourself in the mirror

15:00 so you aim back onto your own gun and the same things happens, you just move it around on the mirror but it's not as accurate because it's too close. And they have also if you want to get a little further away they have aiming posts that you hammer into the ground and you aim on those. So you might have one here, and another one twenty or thirty feet further back so this is in the case of fog or you could be getting shot at or a lot of dust and sand flying around so you use the gun aiming posts.

15:30 **How long does it take to properly aim and prepare the gun to fire?**

Not very long, not very long because the survey fellows always go in first and as soon as you, you drive in with the truck and he backs up and the blokes all pile out and that gadget on the bottom there, is dropped on the ground and the gun pulls forward and pulls it up onto that and that's a platform and then you drive on. Then

16:00 he drives on a bit further and unloads all the ammunition and then he goes away and hides in a camouflage area somewhere and in the meantime while he's doing all that the others are getting the ammunition out, they're getting their readings off the survey party down the back to get their guns in action and it doesn't take very long.

### **And would you ever work with like a spotter aircraft?**

Yes they do, air IP

### **And how does that work?**

They send the grid references back to the

16:30 gun position and what he does then is he watching the fall of shot when the gun is fired so if it goes twenty five yards over he say's "Drop twenty five, go left twenty five" or whatever, down through the radio. And the same thing when the infantry fellows are out they have an FOO, a forward observation officer, who goes with the infantry and he goes up there with them so that if the infantry gets into trouble he gets on his radio and calls back to the guns

17:00 and he directs the fire onto it. And a lot of the infantry officers and sergeants are also trained to do it too if he gets hit but he is the actual expert, he's got his own sig [signaller] and everything.

### **And does he use equipment to calculate the distances?**

Could sometimes use a, he knows where he is normally so he can usually give a grid reference to it off the map and that's what he normally does. They normally know where they are, pretty close because if you don't get it quite right you just get aim for effect

17:30 or something like that and they shoot around and you see where it lands and you can just give them a quick grid reference to where to put it "drop twenty five", "go left fifty" or whatever.

### **And what was the usual distance between an infantry group and artillery?**

Oh it could be anything really because in some cases they use mortars and they're a lot closer anyway and sometimes they use Howitzers which is a similar gun to that, only goes on a higher elevation and they split the trail sort of thing.

**They do what?**

Split the trail,

18:00 that gadget there is a trail. A lot of them have got a split trail. The M282, which is the American gun that we used for quite some time was made like that, whereas that was the English gun, the twenty five pounder. They did have some in the Second World War that they had a split trail on but I never saw one but I knew they were around.

**And whereabouts when you were doing your gunnery training where did you do your field gun training?**

18:30 Field gun training in my day was done at Holsworthy in Sydney and sometimes they used to do a lot of exercises up in Singleton, up in the Singleton Ranges, shoot up there. Had to be careful you didn't knock over any of the cattle and sheep that were on agistment in the area.

**Would that ever happen?**

Occasionally.

**And what sort of theoretical stuff were you learning in the gunnery training?**

In relation to what?

**Guns?**

Well you

19:00 learn basic maintenance on the guns, how to strip them down and repair them, that sort of thing but mostly they have mechanical engineers, gun fitters that are there that do most of it. Most of the minor stuff the gunners can do themselves, the basic stuff, the recoil systems, that's all done by the mechanical engineers. The gun goes back to the workshops.

**And after you'd finished your gunnery**

19:30 **training you became a driver?**

I did, yeah, yeah.

**How did that sort of allocation come about?**

Well I don't remember. I think they just asked me if I wanted to be a driver and I said "Yes, I'll have a go at that". Being at the School of Artillery you had to be able to drive everything.

**What did they have?**

Well they had different guns, different vehicles for different guns and a lot of the equipment we had was radar sets, which were all pulled by different vehicles and different occasions and we also had

20:00 passenger carrying vehicles like coaches. Well they weren't coaches in those days, pretty rugged sort of thing but the old Dodge, lend lease ones, Second World War ones, were the ones we originally had. That was a bucket of bolts.

**And what were the different vehicles that carried the guns?**

Different vehicles, they had the old gun tractors. They were Blitz wagons, the old Blitz wagons, the old square looking jobs. Without a picture I couldn't ever sort of tell you. They were all Second World War jobs when I first went there and we had

20:30 six by six Macs. We had the Mac tractors for the three point sevens and radars and a normal CL, a cargo loading vehicle, for just normal stores. Every vehicle has a different application.

**What about these Blitz wagons, what kind of driving system were they?**

Just a normal driving system, crash gear box, pretty rugged sort of bit of gear but they worked alright, they did the job.

21:00 **What is a crash gear box?**

A crash gear box is no synchro. You've got to double shuffle with the clutch so you can change gears.

**Had you driven something like this before?**

Had I? Yes I have as a matter of fact, yeah.

**And how big are they?**

Just a, the gun tractors themselves were usually a shorter type vehicle, a four wheel drive with

21:30 pannier boxes in the side of them to carry ammunition and equipment, that sort of thing. There was two types, there was a Chev and a Ford and later on we went to the MC trucks which were a far better

vehicle, the American trucks. The other ones were mostly English and Canadian but they were a far better truck and you could get much more gear on them etcetera. And then of course, a lot further down the track we got more modern ones, which

22:00 I wasn't impressed with. I liked the old MC better.

**What were they like to handle?**

Alright, good trucks, for the size of them they did a terrific job but see most of the vehicles in the army are usually rated for cross country so whereas a GMC was rated at two and a half ton it could carry six or seven ton but it was rated two and a half ton for all terrain you see and most of the army vehicles were all rated like that, even

22:30 right up to today.

**What sort of places would you have to drive them around to at North Head?**

At North Head? Oh North Head was easy enough, just all parade ground stuff. But no, we used to do the, go shooting out to the range at Holsworthy and do it there and usually in conjunction with one of the field regiments because they were always training so they'd go with us as well.

**Ever have any accidents?**

No,

23:00 I don't remember ever having one. I was very careful, very careful. The only close accident I had was a funny one. We were up at Singleton with the field regiment then. I'd finished my training and left North Head. My cousin ultimately finished up a major. He was on the line party and they put him on a gun as a layer and we were down a sergeant so they put me on the gun, in charge of the gun and

23:30 they had a setup called "fire by order" and we had been firing and they "ceased firing" so you wind up with one up the barrel so we were just sitting there and I turned to my cousin and he was very toey, wanting to fire it, and I said "Jim" and he said "Yeah?" I said "Don't forget 'fire by order' is in force" but I only got the "fire" out and he let fly and it landed in the middle of a mob of sheep.

**What happened?**

24:00 I got a kick up the bum, well it was my responsibility.

**What happened to him?**

Nothing. He just did what he was told or he thought he did. No, you're responsible for that, anything like that which occurs but that's the closest thing to an accident I ever had.

**What happened to the sheep?**

I don't know that they hit any, just by good luck. We never heard of any if they did.

24:30 That one round.

**What sort of relationship develops, say if you're a driver with the field gunners?**

No, it's a good relationships because half the time you finish up on the guns anyway. You usually just leave enough people around to look after the vehicles in a defensive sort of attitude if that's applicable but if they're down on gunners you'll find that the drivers are up there on the guns with the gunners.

25:00 **What was your favourite job on the gun?**

Oh Number One on the gun is the most favourite one, because he's the sergeant and he don't do nothing. Oh I can't say I fired a gun a terrible lot. I went on as ammunition number quite a few times and I was a lousy layer so I didn't do that. Some blokes are very, very good at it.

**Why weren't you good at it?**

Well it takes

25:30 practise and I didn't get enough practise anyway and a lot of blokes liked it. We had one bloke in our unit called Taffy Evans and he was the best field gun layer in Australia I reckon. He was in the British Army in the Second World War and he could lay a gun like he blinked.

**What does it take to be a good gun layer?**

A gun layer, on the side of the sights there, down in here, I can't see it because of these glasses, there is a bubble so what you get is bubble, line, bubble, so you check the bubble first to see that it is in the centre of the

26:00 graduations, that's elevation. And the line is the line through the gun aiming point behind you so you go bubble, line and if you happen to shift the gun, and you mightn't have to anyway, you go bubble again and then you say "Ready" and put your hand on the breech and Number One says "Fire", if it's

applicable.

**Why do you put your hand on the breech?**

So it is not

26:30 near the cocking lever, and then the firing lever. It has got a safety on it but, normally.

**How long did you spend at North Head?**

About two and a half years I think.

**What was the social life like?**

Didn't do much because we didn't get much pay but Saturday afternoons about eleven o'clock we used to walk down Darley Road in Manly and head

27:00 for one of the pubs and spend the afternoon there and then go home and recover on Sunday and back to work on Monday morning. We never had much money but that didn't worry you but not a bad sort of a hobby, weight lifting ten ounces either hand.

**Was it common to?**

Yeah most blokes always drank. I don't know very many who didn't.

27:30 And at night you had your canteen. It was a pretty small canteen in that camp at that stage in time. They built a much larger one in years down the track but you'd go down and have a few beers. It was only cheap, sixpence for a pot or something in those days and usually have a sing song and that sort of thing in the days when people did those sort of things.

**What kind of a sing song?**

Just depends on how drunk you got.

28:00 Some of them weren't clean, some of them were.

**Do you remember any of them?**

Yeah, none that I'd sing on there though. Most of them were Second World War songs we used to sing.

**Can you give me an example?**

No. Definitely not.

**What would they be about generally?**

28:30 Oh all sorts of things to do with females and different things that men do using lots of swear words and stuff like that. Had some wonderful things about military policeman and officers and warrant officers and stuff like that but all in good fun.

**Would they be set to any tunes or?**

Oh yeah, yeah.

**What kind of tunes?**

Oh just normal popular tunes, Toorali, Oorali Addity and stuff like that.

29:00 **And you're not going to sing any of them?**

No, definitely censored.

**Would you get a chance at North Head to get out and go out to dances or meet any girls or?**

Well that's where I met my first wife actually. She used to work in a café down there but normally we never worried much about it. As I said we didn't have a lot of money anyway to do anything. We had one bloke

29:30 one night said, we were all pretty broke and he said "I know what we'll do, we'll go down to the Catholic Church to the hall." And I said "Oh yeah, what are we going down there for?" And he said "There is this game, it's called bingo. It's great fun." I said "Oh yeah." He said "Yeah, we'll get a bottle of plonk [wine] on the way." And I thought "okay." So away we went down to this bingo and we got in there and oh, oh, bingo. I was going to kill him. So we fished the bottle of plonk from under the rose bushes out the back and went down

30:00 and sat down the beach.

**You didn't go to bingo?**

No, and I never have been since. It's alright for the old ladies. Yeah, I wasn't impressed with that game.

**How did you meet your wife?**

Just from going down there and getting a feed occasionally and they were pretty cheap, two and six for a hamburger and onions and a couple of eggs on the side and a sausage and stuff like that. That was

30:30 just around the corner from the pub.

**And how did your relationship develop?**

I think we went out a few times, didn't go anywhere much. Just down to the pub to have a few drinks, and that sort of thing and eventually got married. Had a son, he lives in Newcastle now and we parted company when I went

31:00 to National Service as I sort of couldn't get home and that sort of thing and just a parting of the ways and she died from cancer about five years later.

**And when you were based at North Heads and you got married while you were there, so were you still living in the camp?**

No, we actually lived with an old fellow down in Manly, had one room sort of thing, didn't work out real well

31:30 but it was alright and then I moved back out to where my family was. My mother was still there and my father was out in Moorebank in the army and I got a house there, pretty tumbledown old joint and she got pretty lonely there because it was a hell of a long way from Ingleburn back to Narrabeen every week and the money wasn't real flash anyway but it was just a parting of the ways, one of those things that

32:00 happened. I used to come home and she'd be at her mother's place at Manly or something like that but I can't blame her for that because she didn't know many people out there.

**And what was it about her that made you decide to marry her?**

I don't know. Why do people get married? I think impetuous. We were both a bit young anyway. My stepmother tried to stop us actually.

32:30 If I had of taken notice I wouldn't have got married would I?

**Why did she try and stop you?**

Too young she reckoned.

**How old were you?**

At that stage in time what would I have been... About nineteen or something, we had to get permission, not like they do today. They do what they like.

**And how did your life change having a son?**

Well it wasn't long after that because I was at National Service that I was transferred to One Field Regiment at Holsworthy and I was only there about twelve

33:00 months and I was posted to Malaya so I didn't see much of my son at all. In fact I think, yeah, he was born before I went away, that's right. But she went and lived with her mother with my son at that time and she ultimately remarried.

**Did you officially have to get a divorce or?**

33:30 Where was I? No, I was in Malaya, came home and yeah, she divorced me, yeah, yeah.

**What happened to your son after she died?**

He lived with his stepfather and his mother for quite a number of years and then in 1970, I think it would have been, not long after I got out of the army, I got a phone call from his mother to say that he was in gaol at Maxwell so I had to go and

34:00 fish him out of gaol so he came and lived with me for a while and it didn't work out too well with my second wife so he ended up going back to Sydney and I never saw him for quite a few years and then my brother rang me up, that's right he rang me up and said "Your son is having his twenty first birthday party" so I didn't say anything, I just flew down.

34:30 And I didn't see him again for quite a few years after that and then when my present wife and myself got married he heard from my other son that I was getting married so he rang me up and we've been in very close contact ever since and he runs a transport business with a government laundry down in Newcastle, so he's done alright.

35:00 **And how much did you get to see of him when he was little?**

Very little at all. In fact I never saw him from when he was baby until I pulled him out of gaol. He got tangled up with some bloke on drugs and they pinched a motorbike and did a few burglaries and stuff



like that so I went down to the court at Maxwell in New South Wales and saw him in the slot and he knew who I was and I said "I will see what I can do about getting you out of

35:30 this" and anyway I went to court and I'd done a few court martials in the army so I knew how to present myself so anyway I presented myself to the judge down there and had a good talk and said "Oh well I will take him into my custody and so forth and look after him" and blah, blah, blah and he was sort of looking at me "Where did this bloke come from?" Anyway he agreed and he said "okay that will be alright" so they put him back in the cells for a while

36:00 and on the way out the prosecuting sergeant said to me "Have you ever been in the police force?" I said "No" and I said "Why?" He said "You should have been a bloody lawyer". He said "You do a better job than some lawyers I know". Anyway I got him off and he come to live with me for a while in Brisbane and he got a bit hard to handle and he decided he wanted to go back to Sydney so he went back to Sydney and lived with my brother for a while and then I never saw him again until he turned twenty one.

36:30 **What was it like trying to have a relationship with him after having not known him?**

Oh alright, as I said I was working, well he didn't like the discipline side of things. I was working with TNT as a freight forwarding sub contractor and I used to take him on the truck working with me and he wasn't real impressed with the Mexican filly, manual labour. And but no, he went alright but then he decided, he was clashing with my wife, then, at the time so

37:00 I thought the best thing I can do is send him back down there, which was a breech of my custody agreement I might add but he did alright.

**How old was he when he was in prison?**

About seventeen or eighteen or something.

**And when he was little did you keep any kind of contact, write to him or?**

No, I didn't, no, no. Well as a fact the last I heard of them where I could have done anything like that they were in Western Australia so I didn't even know he was back until

37:30 I found out he was in the slot but it has all worked out.

**And when did you move from North Head to National Service?**

I moved from North Head, initially I went to a unit called 1AGRA Group, which was at Georges Heights, and it was a CMF unit and I was the brigadier's driver there, a fellow by the name of Brigadier Thomas, who had been

38:00 with the British Army during the war. He was an Australian, lovely old bloke he was and he was one of the head sherangs in the Commonwealth Bank in Sydney, in Martin Place and I went into his office one day and sunk up to my knees in the carpet and he was a top old guy. I used to go and pick him up and go around all these CMF units and his wife used to pack us lunch and a bottle of beer and if we went to Newcastle or somewhere like that we'd pull up along the road and have a barbeque and well sandwiches and whatever and keep going. No, he was a good old fellow and then there

38:30 was another bloke who went looking for a posting, a Pommy bloke I knew, and there was a job going in another unit in the same building and I said "Well what say I swap with you and you can come down and be the brigadier's driver, if you want to put in for the job." So he did that and he did that job and I moved to the next one and he stayed there for the next six months and I went to 16 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which was out at Dee Why and my feet hardly hit the ground in that place and they

39:00 needed national service instructors very, very badly so I ended up going to 14 National Service Battalion at Ingleburn and I have never worked so hard in my life because there was so many national servicemen coming through in those days, this was in the fifties. Where a platoon was normally about thirty blokes sometimes we'd have over eighty or ninety blokes in a platoon, and sometimes only three or four instructors so you were really worked, no time off at all. No,

39:30 I didn't mind it I suppose. It is those photographs there, show you that sort of an era.

**When did the national service start coming through?**

I think it was 1950/51 or something when the initial lot of national service started. That was the three month thing, you used to go in for three months and then they had to go and do two years in a CMF unit or a reserve unit

40:00 as they call them now to finish their training.

00:38 **Tell us how you were instructed to be an instructor?**

Yes, because in the Australian Army when you are, if you do an NCO course, which is normally for your first two stripes, you have got to, part of your

01:00 training is to train other people in the class that you are in on the gun itself and this is a learning curve. Do you understand what I'm? So if for instance, ammunition handling the instructors says to you the day before "Gunner Jewell, you're going to be doing section number five of the class work today, tomorrow on ammunition handling, how to set fuses"

01:30 or something like that, so you've got to go out in front of the class and you instruct them how to set fuses, that sort of thing, or safety on ammunition. It could be anything, could be recognition of a target, all that sort of stuff so you virtually become the instructor and you watch by the instructor himself when he's doing it and that way you're learning to become an instructor yourself.

02:00 And some of the things they do to you they'll, you'll be sitting in the class one day and the instructor will walk in and say "Righto, we're going to have an impromptu instruction session here" and he'll throw a biro at you and say "I want you to give a three minute talk on that biro." So you say "Right, that's the biro, it's got a point on it, it's got a little ball in it and

02:30 blah, blah, blah" and that teaches you how to become an instructor. So basically all junior NCO's were people who do instruction work and are taught from the word go so that basically everybody becomes an instructor. You mightn't get promoted but at least you've been taught how to instruct because in a lot of cases when you went to some of these national service setups they'd post a bloke in and he was a private soldier as a corporal instructor,

03:00 with no stripes. He'd normally get promoted anyway but that's basically the way it goes.

**And tell us about the national service? What kind of men or boys or young men were they?**

Oh we used to get some real characters. I've seen them walk through the front gate with a saddle over his shoulder, "G'day mate, just left me horse at Homebush and I'm down here to do me instruction with you blokes" and his hair hanging in his eyes. And you

03:30 got the normal city blokes. In those days they'd have long hair hanging everywhere and winkle picker boots on and all sorts of things and they hated your guts for the first couple of weeks because you'd send them down to get all their hair chopped off. Country blokes couldn't care less. University students were the worst of the lot because they considered you as a sergeant or a corporal instructor because they're semi academics you're the bottom of the pile but you soon taught that you weren't, very, very subtly.

04:00 **How, how would you teach them that you weren't?**

Just a bit of discipline that they weren't used to and if they didn't do things properly they were taught how to do it in a manner that they didn't forget next time.

**Give us some examples of what you did?**

Well for instance some of the things you used to do is naturally enough being an NCO, sometimes you used to get blokes in who had done voluntary CMF work and

04:30 they'd been in the CMF or some of them were pretty bright and they learn very quickly so you'd promote him to a corporal or a lance corporal, so if you had a bloke or a couple of blokes in your section that wasn't sort of pulling his weight and he was making it hard for the other fellows, the reason that you did this of course is they had competition between platoons, sections and companies, cock of the walk things and stuff like that and you got extra days leave if you were

05:00 real good, all that sort of stuff so it gives incentive. So if you've got a bloke like that you'd call one of your corporals in, your acting corporals and say, I didn't say this, "Private Smith is pulling your blokes back, there is a pretty fair chance that if you win this competition you'll get a day's leave or a couple of days leave or something like that. Now if this bloke is not going to pull into line he's going to pull the whole lot of youse back, what do you reckon about doing something about it?"

05:30 "Okay", so the next morning when you call them out on a belly parade you see a bloke with a big, fat lip and you never had any more trouble with him then. Couldn't do that in today's army, could you? Didn't hurt anybody.

**Well were there anything like initiation ceremonies?**

No, no, no, not normally. If there was I never saw one and nobody ever complained about them because men were men in those days but national servicemen,

06:00 like the old sixties servicemen, the Vietnam boys, they hated the idea when they came in but they were typical Aussie Diggers. When they came in they said "damn it, there's a job to done, we'll do it" and they all fronted up, they were good. And quite often you might mention to somebody, they'd be walking past and a lot of them were tradespeople and a lot of them had a few dollars and stuff like that and say "Gee

I don't know how I'm going to get to Liverpool tonight"

06:30 and one of the blokes would walk past you and slip you a bunch of keys "Use my truck, sarge", so they were good. You'd have break ups at the end of their three month period, you'd have break ups and you'd gain cigarette lighters and ball point pens and all sorts of stuff they'd give you. No, they were good blokes.

**Were there any which were particularly good and took to the...**

Yeah some of them did. They applied for officers' training courses

07:00 and stuff like that, yeah, oh yeah.

**What about any groups from society that really took to the army kind of life well?**

Oh country blokes were the best and the city blokes adapted pretty well too. In fact country blokes did it just like that, no trouble at all.

**Why is that?**

I don't know. It is just their different upbringing, city blokes live different to the country blokes don't they? They're used to roughing it a bit, go out and sleep amongst the cattle and all this sort of thing and as I said I say a bloke come staggering in with a saddle over his shoulder and "G'day mate, I'm here to do me training".

07:30 Quite a laugh really but you got used to it but they were funny because after I left there I found out later on they were having trouble, one of the roofs collapsed in one of their barracks and what they'd do, they went around and the roofs were full of empty bottles. Guess where they came from? Never knew they had a drink in the place but you did for the simple reason

08:00 if they saw you that you were a bit crook from the mess the night before you'd hear a tap on the window and the silhouette would be there with the hand with the bottle in it so you never looked to see who's hand it was, things like that. So they were all good blokes.

**What kind of ages were they?**

Some of them were pretty young, I don't know what age they'd be.

08:30 Eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I've had them up to twenty five, twenty six, because some of them had deferred because of trades they were in and things like that but basically, no, they were great but no, we had a lot of fun sometimes.

**And were they picked randomly or were there certain professions or anyone who was?**

No, no, we all put in usually. The worst one I ever struck, I got a platoon or eighty five percent of them were university students and they'd be the most useless bunch I've ever struck in my life.

09:00 Talk about frustrating!

**Well give us some examples of what they'd do?**

Oh words fail me mate, words fail me. Some of the simplest things you'd try to get them do, just, and they're our future leaders of the country, you know what I'm saying? Just absolutely hopeless. Some of them came up alright but no, they're just academics and they're the sort of thing, for instance I've got a niece of mine who is married to a solicitor now

09:30 and he admits he left school, went straight into university, went straight into being a top solicitor and he said "If I've got to change a flat tyre on my car I call the RACQ because I don't know how to do it" and that's the sort of thing you were up against. But you put them round with weapons like a Bren gun or something like that you could spend half your life teaching them how to pull it to bits and put it together and they still couldn't do it.

**Well what kind of things were you instructing them on exactly?**

Well when they came in you started them right from scratch,

10:00 basic infantry training straight off, weapons handling, the rifle, bayonet, Alan machine carbine, Ewy rifle in those days, didn't bother about mortars, normal foot drill, saluting on the march and normal old things and then you'd transfer that to the normal gun and our particular section was Bofor gun so we used to teach them to use the Bofor gun. And once they got

10:30 proficient down, I forget the name of the place now, used to take them down and fire the guns out to sea and basically after that was a march out and they went to their units.

**Did they enjoy this part?**

Yeah, a ton of fun, yeah, a ton of fun, yeah.

**And how hard were you working? How hard was it?**

Well in some cases as I said you'd wind up with eighty people in a platoon where you're only supposed to have thirty and sometimes you'd only

- 11:00 have three or four instructors and I mean a basic class is maximum of eight to ten people, to teach them properly and if you can imagine you've got six men on a gun and you've got eighty people and you can imagine how many people and how many guns you've got and you're trying to do the whole lot by yourself, damn hard work.

**How do you do that?**

Well you just had to do it and that's all there was to it.

**Was their management kind of techniques or something that you?**

- 11:30 Oh I don't know, we just did it, that's all there was to it and they were usually proficient. I never had any accidents or anything like that.

**And how long were you doing this work for?**

It was probably about eight or six months at 13 Battalion before I went across to the Field Regiment.

**Well tell us about that, moving across to the Field Regiment?**

Well I was there and they informed me that I wouldn't be going back to the other unit that I had come from, which was only a temporary posting anyway and

- 12:00 I think they had ideas of me going there as it was and they said "Oh you're posted to 1 Field Regiment." "That suits me, yeah, good." Some of the funny ones in national service, in between intakes they used to send you out attached to the provos, military police, and you'd be in an old FJ Holden ute or something, with a cage on the back and we used to go around some of the most salubrious parts of Sydney, like New Town, Redfern and Marrickville and all around that area looking

- 12:30 for blokes that had absconded on their training. And so you'd have one bloke sitting in a narrow gutted street, sitting there with the engine running and you'd walk up and knock on the door and you'd hear (demonstrates) and somebody runs out the backdoor. Some old bloody, an old woman would stand there with no teeth and a cigarette hanging out of the mouth and "What do you bastards want?" sort of thing and other times the bloke would walk out "Alright, alright, I'll come with you". So we used to take them out to Holsworthy to the provo's gaol type thing. What do they call it? A re- I forget what they call it now, but it was a gaol anyway,

- 13:00 a lockup, and they used to get out there and scrub floors with a toothbrush and cut grass with a pair of scissors and everything you did on the march and you shaved with a blunt razor in cold water, all those good things, to make sure the dickhead doesn't do it again.

**How did you know where to go to these places?**

- 13:30 Oh you got the addresses and you used to just go there and a couple, and we used to be bunked in with the military police in town, in Victoria Barracks, and occasionally just for something to do, in those days there was a hell of lot of troops around, the provos were always doing, the provos were doing trips around town just watching for Diggers playing up and we used to go with them just for something to do. On odd occasions

- 14:00 we'd back the police up because we were on the same radio as they were anyway. There was one situation there that is not really broadly advertised, the Orcades was in, which was a big passenger ship, in the Fifties, and some of the national service boys went down to the wharves, around the pubs down there and some of these Pommy boys got stuck in and nearly killed a couple of them and that was on a, I think it was a Thursday night, and

- 14:30 they were all back and prior to that we were all in camp on Saturday night and there was nobody around and they all went down and they got stuck into the Pommy's and the ship didn't sail anyway, we'd picked up half their crew.

**What had the Pommy's done?**

They belted them up, yeah, nearly killed a couple of them.

**How did it start?**

Oh no idea but the national service boys, being typical Australians thought "We'll even this little lot up" so they went down and got stuck into the Orcades blokes.

- 15:00 **And would you have the power to go into a place where you thought a Digger was?**

No, no.

**So how would you?**

Oh you'd just go and say "I am looking for Bill Smith" or whatever his name is and they'd tell you to get stuffed or something, "Not here" and you'd hear him run out the back door but we tried and it was

surprising how many we picked up.

15:30 **And these places, what were they like?**

Oh, oh, Newtown and Marrickville and around the back of Redfern and Surrey Hills, mate, pretty rugged, pretty rugged but it wasn't always those areas. Some of the areas you went to were alright but in those places you always had a bloke sitting in the vehicle with the engine running in case three or four come running out at you, leave the door open.

**And would you find them in pubs and stuff as well?**

No, no, never get that silly.

16:00 **So tell us after this work what were you doing next?**

After national service? Well I went to 1 Field Regiment.

**I mean after that? With that, like the lead up to your overseas service?**

Yeah, it was, yeah. Yeah, went there. That was in late '56, early '57 I think because we went up to north Queensland, one of the biggest military exercises they had

16:30 after the war, Icebreaker I think it was called, Icebreaker? I am not sure of the name of it but we went up to near Mackay in an area called Gilston's Gap and they took tanks, they took everything up there. They came from all over Australia and we drove up from Sydney and, yeah, we drove up from Sydney all the way up there and they formed camps all the way through that

17:00 area. And what they did was, apparently they put airstrips in for different stations that we were working on and roads and stuff like that and they had the SAS [special air service] in there as the enemy and we sort of had to go around chasing them up.

**And how would you do these games?**

Oh they went in certain areas and they fired guns

17:30 where the imaginary Blue Force was or whatever they were, that sort of thing, infantry did patrols and the SAS [Special Air Service] captured them and they captured SAS and just war games virtually, that's all it was.

**What do you do about firing weapons?**

We didn't have ammunition.

**So how do you prove that you?**

"Bang you're dead", no they actually had umpires. The umpires used to drive around with a blue armband on or something like that and

18:00 they'd watch how the units were moving around and they'd give them so many points and say "Right, you wiped so many of them out and they wiped so many of you out" and just virtually war games but it was a huge exercise.

**And what was the purpose of the exercise?**

Just training, just training because everything had to move by road, so you could say if we'd been attacked up in that part of the world we would have to have moved by road. In those days there was nothing airborne

18:30 that we could move them on so it would have to have been road, so that's exactly what we did.

**Was there talk of possible threats at the time, like in this period?**

No, not that I ever heard of there wasn't, no, no.

**What about communism, was there talk about communism?**

No, not as such, no, that I ever heard. No, we usually were Blue Force and Orange Force and but it was just imaginary enemy and

19:00 it was the defence of northern Australia.

**What about generally, the talk of communism in that era, in the lead up to Malaya?**

I think there was a bit around but I don't remember a terrible lot around. No, I don't think we sort of worried about it. We got more into it after we went there of course because they were communist terrorist, Chin Peng [Leader of the Malaysian Communist Party] and his mob, but that all started in what? 1948 so we came in on the tail end of it, along with

19:30 Kiwis and others of course.

**And tell us about personally, the lead up to going overseas to Malaya?**

Well we did that exercise I told you about and we didn't even know we were going and we got back and we were only back a few days and our

- 20:00 battery commander called me up, old Hip Shot his name was, that was his nickname, Second World War bloke, very nice bloke and Jack Kelly was his offsider and he called me up and he said "You're virtually a single bloke aren't you?" And I said "Yeah" and he said "How do you feel about going on a advanced party to Malaya? The unit has been warned to Malaya." I said "I don't care. I'll go" and there was a few of us. That's some of them in that photograph there and that's how I found
- 20:30 out we were going and we knew of course about the CT [communist terrorist] threat and we knew about that because 105 Battery was the first in and then followed by 100 A Field Battery and then ourselves, so we knew about that side of it but that was all virtually. So that was a case of "Well you're warned to go, you'll be going in two weeks" and I said "Alright" and to quote an Americanism "That's cool man." Anyway and so we went and so we
- 21:00 were there about six weeks before the main body turned up so that meant that I was attached to 100 A Field Battery while I was there. So that was okay and we were just billeted in there and taking over certain sections of the unit we were taking over from and then they said to me "You've got to go to Johor Bahru", which is down near Singapore. It was a huge big army, British Army ordnance store or camp
- 21:30 and I said "Yeah, what for?" And they said "You've got to take four Diggers with you and the Kiwis [New Zealanders] are sending four and the engineers are sending a couple down and we're going to go down in a landing craft, a big English landing craft." A huge big thing it was and they had all this bombed out equipment in there, bulldozers and trucks and God knows what wasn't inside it. So we got onboard this thing and we took off
- 22:00 and we went down the coast and headed for Johor Bahru and we were out for about four hours and the English captain, army fellow, it was an army thing, wasn't navy and he said "We've got a bit of a storm coming up, shouldn't be too bad." Famous last words, it was the side of a typhoon and I've never seen anything like it, except in the movies, in my life. There was waves up there I wouldn't like to think about and they crashed down over the top of us and they come down into the landing barge and there was about fifteen
- 22:30 foot of water in there and all the stuff broke loose and it was all chained down of course. And the Kiwi bloke said "Well we're going to die, we'll die happy" and at this time I'm standing in the stern looking up towards the front and the stern went way and the bow went that way, flat bottom thing and I thought "This thing is going to break in half". He said "We might as well die happy" so he pulled out four bottles of Gurka [regiment of Nepalese fighting under British Command] rum and we retired to the little galley, which is about that size and
- 23:00 we sat on the floor and drank the Gurka rum and went peacefully to sleep, well not peacefully but. Anyway we got up the next morning, very sick from this stuff and oh what a mess. Finally sailed into Johor Bahru and they couldn't drop the ramp on the front of it. We had to go over the side on a rope ladder to get out of it. Went on leave in Singapore for a couple of days, went back out, picked some trucks up and drove them back up north.

23:30 **Do you know how it didn't break up and sink?**

No, we must have been seaworthy I think. I never want to go through it again, I can assure you. Yeah, quite interesting.

**Tell us, before we go on tell us about your first impressions as you arrived in Malaysia? What was it like for you?**

Ah well we went over on a, oh yeah, we went over on a Super Constellation. I don't know if you've ever seen one or not? They're a

- 24:00 big English aircraft, big twin tail on them, four engines and a top bit of gear in their day and we landed in Darwin and something was wrong with it there so we stopped and I thought "I'll go and have a cold shower" and Darwin was all the old war time huts. I thought "I might have a shower while I am here" and I walked in and turned their water on and nearly got scalded to death and there was no hot water.
- 24:30 So anyway we drank it dry on the way I might add and had a few more beers there and they decided "Okay, we're ready to go" and we went out and got in the Super Connie and away we went and something happened and we had to lob in at Jakarta in Indonesia, so they didn't like us very much there, all in uniform of course. So we got out and they herded us into these old concert huts at the point of a bloody gun and then somebody said "There is no toilets in here", so I thought "I might go looking for one".
- 25:00 I opened the door and nearly got shot for my troubles, poking me in the belly, "Get back in" so finally they got it going and we went straight from there to Singapore, landed in Singapore and yeah, they put us in buses and took us out to the railway station and we went by train from there up to George Town.

**So you landed in Jakarta? Isn't that kind of unusual**

25:30 **considering you...**

Had no troubles considering one of the motors, one of the fans wasn't working too well or something. I don't know what the problem was, yeah.

**Was it an unusual situation going to Malaya to possibly...?**

Yeah, we weren't supposed to land there, oh no, oh no. In those days the Indonesian fellows didn't particularly like us apparently but it wasn't long after that in 1962 we were fighting

26:00 them in Borneo anyway, so it seems sort of figures out, doesn't it?

**And tell us, you were there, when you arrived who was there to instruct you what to do?**

Oh there was normal army personnel there which is their job and they just ferried us out onto these buses and down to the railway station and we went from there straight through to, by train, to Kuala Lumpur and we stopped for a few hours in Kuala Lumpur and then straight through

26:30 up to George Town. So then they came and picked us up but there was only us as the advanced party plus there was the advanced party for the battalion and the engineers and all these other people were on board as well.

**And what your role, your task in these first few weeks as an advance party?**

Well what you do is go around and check off stores that are signed over to us, from one unit to the other, sort of thing but I was only there for probably only a week or ten days when we had to go down and

27:00 get these vehicles and come back and we virtually didn't do anything much at all after that, we just sort of sat around and our mob came up by boat on the [HMAS] Sydney. I think it was the Sydney or the [HMAS] Melbourne was it? I'm not quite sure, one of them and they landed and we were standing on the wharf "It's about time you blokes got here".

27:30 **And what vehicles were you picking up?**

GMC trucks, yeah, GMC trucks. The Pommy's didn't like the GMC trucks. I don't know why. They had the bloody old Bedfords. They were rubbish and we were finally to the stage when we, just before we came home we still had GMC's and the only way we had them was because we had four and five down the paddock and we used to cannibalise them to keep our GMC's going but the next unit that took over from us

28:00 they got landed with the Bedfords. Good luck to them, we didn't like them.

**Why not?**

They are not a good truck. Well I don't know whether they weren't sure about trucks or not and at times we'd go out to do an operation and they used to supply ammunition to us and one particular instance I remember we were in a tapioca field and a tapioca field has got big bumps like where the tapioca plants grow

28:30 and they pulled up outside and said "We can't get our trucks in there" because we'd already driven our trucks, guns and everything in and put them in there and I said to my blokes "Righto, bring your trucks out here", so we went out and they only had two and a half ton on them so we threw two loads out of their trucks into one GMC and just drove them straight in and they couldn't believe that we could do it but that shows the difference between the trucks. The GMC was a far superior vehicle.

29:00 **And what were the quirks of driving a GMC? Was there anything you had to know or?**

Oh not really. They were probably a little bit harder to drive than, I think the Bedfords had synchromesh gear boxes in them and ours were all crash and ours were six wheel drive where their's were only four, which is a big advantage when you're pulling guns.

**In what way?**

Better traction. You can get in over rougher country, less damage to

29:30 the vehicle and what's on it, all those sorts of thing. I am biased of course but by the same token I've driven both vehicles and the GMC's are far superior vehicles and we got Studebaker's after that but that's another story.

**Did you have to make any adjustments to go over rougher country, off road?**

Not really, apart from all wheel drive, that's all. But in country like that you just put

30:00 it probably six wheel drive, second gear, and just crawl over it, take your time.

**And how do you transport the guns?**

Hooked onto the back of the gun, they're towed, these fellows here. You just tow them into where they've got to go, put them in position and then we go into a harbour up point for your vehicles, usually with some form of defence around them in case some bad guys decide to have a go at you and the guns look after themselves but usually you're fairly close.

**What kind of protection do you have for the trucks?**

30:30 Well depending on the situation, you might dig a hole, a fox hole, something like that and the obvious place you don't get is under the truck because that's the first thing they will try to blow up, so you usually opt to one side of that. But most times we didn't worry too much about it because as I say we came in pretty much on the tail of the emergency over there but they were still there, there was no doubt about that. You didn't know when to expect them.

31:00 **And so as a truck driver are you meant to be stationed next to your truck during?**

Normally yes, yes, yes, so if you've got to move fast you can for obvious reasons.

**And where were the guns firing into?**

Usually into, oh whatever area where they thought the bad guys were. Half the time I reckon we were shooting monkeys and rubber trees but anyway you would never know but usually the infantry were up there and they would call down fire

31:30 into where they thought somebody was. That was the general idea of it.

**How did they call in where they were?**

By radio, radio, on radio. But they did two lots up there. We used guns mostly but we had four point two mortars and we used to take those in. At one stage in time up there near the Thai border they manned backed them and I was glad I wasn't on that one. They are heavy things.

32:00 **Did you ever have to operate the mortars yourself?**

I did when I was in infantry. I never used a mortar when I was in artillery. The artillery had four point two mortars and the infantry had three inch, very similar to look at but a lot bigger. In later years, in Vietnam, they had the eighty millimetres, the American ones.

**But during this time in Malaya?**

No, no, never had anything to do with the mortars, just the twenty five pounders but as I said I spent a fair bit of time

32:30 in the early days attached to two other units while I was there.

**And what area were some of these firings going into, (UNCLEAR)?**

Mostly up north, up towards Grik, which was fifteen, twenty miles north of where we were. Some of them, we did one down at Ipoh we did one.

33:00 There was a cave situation down in there where they thought they might have some in there and we went down and backed up the, there was an English artillery unit down there and they put a battery in and we put a battery in and there was all these, like, you could see them on the side of the road when you go through, just before Ipoh there is like a big hill and it's a lot like white and there is all these cave in there. They had a lot of trouble getting them out of them in

33:30 early days and they thought they might have been in there again so they went down and had a go at them. But security was pretty good due to the fact that sometimes you'd go in somewhere to put guns in and the magnolia man would be waiting for you. The magnolia man sells ice cream, top secret move and the ice cream man was sitting there waiting for you when you went in. It was a bloody joke.

34:00 **Did you get some ice cream when you finished?**

I never, no. Didn't always happen but occasionally but whether they sort of heard us coming down the road and sort of took a punt on where we were going or not I don't know but we used to always have a laugh about it. To find out where we're going, just look out for the magnolia man.

**What kind of other interactions did you have with the local people there?**

34:30 Not a great deal, didn't have much to do with them. I used to get out with a bloke named Donny Nolan and he was born in Malaya and he was left over from the battery in front of us and Donny and I got to be pretty good friends. And occasionally just for a joke, because the provo's used to, mostly Pommy, used to patrol around and see what was going on and we used to get dressed up as noggies [Malays] because I was a lot thinner than I am, and darker in those days and put a bloody noggy hat on and we'd be sitting there and (demonstrates) and

35:00 (demonstrates) and they thought we were noggies but he could talk Malay fluently. I wasn't too bad at it but we used to just for a joke.

**Did any workers come onto your camp?**



Yeah, we used to have boot boys, what they called boot boys and we had a lovely old fellow, I used to have a photograph of him but I don't know where it is, old Banta. He was there before the war with the British Army,

35:30 he was there with the Japs and then when we arrived he went through the two batteries before us and then with us and then he left us when we moved further on later on. He was a lovely old fellow, an old Indian but they used to make your bed for you, polish your boots and your brass.

**What were they like?**

Good, good. One bloke was a thief. We got him, a young fellow.

**What was he trying to steal?**

Actually he stole

36:00 the troop funds. There was a couple of hundred dollars Malay, which wasn't a lot of money in those days because a dollar was only worth about three shillings or something and it was my locker actually. I left the door open and I come back and there was only one person in the basher, a basher is a hut, and when I came back it was gone. It stood to reason but I couldn't prove it.

**Did you do anything to him?**

Oh couldn't do much at all.

36:30 The old Malays they were dead set on dogs. Used to have a dog catcher and the way the dog catcher used to catch dogs was with a shot gun so you'd be walking along and you'd hear "bang" and down goes the dog. One of their funny little ones, because to Muslims dogs are unclean.

37:00 We went into a place in Kuantan up on the east coast and one of the blokes put a dog on one of their boats so they pushed it out and burnt it. They did kick up a stink. We had a dog as a mascot so they don't like dogs.

**Would you interact with them say if you went on leave to bars or anything?**

It helped if you could speak Malay and one of the things

37:30 that they did like, especially with Australians, is that they had a lot of time for Australians, most Malays, and the Chinese population but they didn't have much time for our English friends.

**Why?**

Oh the old English raj type thing, they treated them like dirt over there. And our blokes told us that they used to spit on them occasionally, spit on the Pom, they didn't like them but the Malay as a soldier was, to my mind's eye,

38:00 as I say I was attached to another unit and we had quite a few of them around and they weren't much bloody good, "Follow me fellows" and you'd be out there by yourself. The police force was mainly Indian and Chinese and they had a special police force, field force, and they were good. Anybody who was any good in those jobs wasn't a Malay because they were lazy buggers. Their women do all the work and

38:30 they sit round and puff on a cigarette. I'll probably get bloody Islamics on me after this.

**And what about, I don't know, restaurants or bars, would you?**

There is one there I showed you a while ago called the Egyptian Bar. It used to be just across the road from where we were and we used to go there and eat noggie tucker [food], and it was good and we used to go across to Penang on leave occasionally

39:00 and you'd go to the Piccadilly and a few other. There was another one, the Hong Kong Bar and a lot of blokes used to go there. He loved Australians, only a little place but we used to go there and other places.

**What would you get up to there?**

Never mind.

**Why's that?**

A clean

39:30 living young fellow, me.

## Tape 5

00:37 Yeah I think I mentioned that I was moved around to other different units when I was there? And one of

the units that I was sent up to was an engineer firm, Australian Engineers' 17 Construction Squadron. They were sent up to the, oh just a couple of miles

- 01:00 short of the Thai border and we had to go up to a place called Grik and we had to get on dugout canoes with outboard motors in them. Now we had to go up the Perak River, which heads up towards the Thai border and there was two boat boys in them and there was six of us to each dug out canoe, from memory and we started up through there. On that river there is a lot of rapids and as we hit each rapid we had to
- 01:30 stop and take all your gear out. All you could carry was a bandolier around your neck and a rifle in your hand because if you went over the side you'd go down like a stone if you had all your gear on or get caught up in the water. So you'd stop at each rapid and you'd portage all the gear around it and one person would stay there and guard it and the rest of you would go back with you to push the thing by hand in close to the bank and you were sometimes up to your neck in water until
- 02:00 you got up to the other side where you left all your gear and reloaded it and away you'd go again. My trip up was a bit traumatic due to the fact, and I don't know to this day whether the boat boy was playing funnies or not but the motor kept conking out on it so where the trip should have taken about five hours we were only half way coming on dark. And anyway one of those things in portaging around
- 02:30 the banks of that river were guarded by the Ghurkhas and mostly you couldn't see them. Occasionally you might see a hand come up and wave to you out of the jungle and on odd occasions, I got six months growth frightened out of me. I was walking up the road carrying a heap of stuff and I stepped over a Bren gun barrel and I didn't even see them there so that was good, we knew they were there and there was no chance of getting shot at. Anyway as I said we got about half way
- 03:00 and it was coming on dark and being the ranking NCO I decided "okay, we'll stop". And I was looking around for somewhere and we came to an area with a sandbank in the middle of the river and I thought "that will do me, we can guard that overnight." So we pulled in and put the canoe up and tied it up on the bank and I made the two boatmen get up the other end of the sandbank
- 03:30 and we stood guard all night. Heard a few funny noises but nothing happened to us anyway so we got going again the next morning and we didn't know where we were and we didn't know if there was anybody around us, if there were still Ghurkhas there looking at us or not, we didn't know so we had to sit up all night. So finally we made it up to the airstrip and it was being built virtually by hand. There was no equipment whatsoever. It was being cleared by hand
- 04:00 and we were carrying, initially when we got there we had a gadget called a chonker. It's like a long handle with a big steel blade on it, like a big mattock sort of thing and they call that a chonker. It's a Malay word and what we were doing there were blokes chopping the earth up with a chonker and we had these wicker work baskets and we were virtually just walking backwards and forwards and filling holes in with these, like a mob of coolies [labourers]. Anyway we did this for a couple of days and then they parachuted
- 04:30 some wheelbarrows and shovels, picks and stuff down to us so we continued on with it so I suppose we were there about four weeks and it was getting pretty much to the stage where it was almost useable.

#### **What are the sort of logistics of building an airstrip?**

You've just got to clear it and level the earth out so the plane can land and doesn't run into trees and stuff like that or any rocks or stuff like that.

#### **How much clear space needs to be around it?**

Depending on the type of aircraft, it

- 05:00 was probably five or six hundred yards long I suppose and not much wider than the width. The particular aircraft in was a Bristol Freighter, an English aircraft. Anyway we cleared it, filled in all the holes and then an English squadron leader came in, and they flew around over the top of us and because it was sort of due to be ready on a particular time and they came in and we gave them the green light and we thought "it's probably okay"
- 05:30 on a Very pistol [flare], so this bloke dived out the door and parachuted in and it's the only way you could get in other than up the river. So he walked around and had a look and pushed his heel into the ground and "she's right", so he gave them a green Very light and in came the aeroplane. We were standing off to one side and all of a sudden a lot of dirt started flying out from under the wheels and its nose started to go up and then the fans hit the dirt and there is dirt flying everywhere and we flew because you didn't know where it was going to finish up.
- 06:00 So we built a good airstrip, the first aeroplane in crashed.

#### **Was that a problem with the airstrip?**

Oh the ground was too soft but he reckoned it was alright and we weren't going to argue with him. That was okay so ran over to the aircraft when it finally stopped and there was too very brown skinned Malay's looking very white hanging up on straps up in the tail. You could see them up in the door so we

threw a rope over it and pulled it back down again and they climbed down and

06:30 having a bit of a shake up and there was an Australian pilot and an English pilot up in the front of it and they said "That was a bit interesting for a little while wasn't it?" As calm as you like, so that was okay and so they decided that we couldn't do much more other than repair what had been stuffed up so we did that and they said, they sent a crew in. Yeah, they come up by boat but they

07:00 sent two new fans up for it but where there were a few holes in the front of it they put some hundred miles an hour tape over it to stop the wind whistling over it. I didn't see that. We left to go down.

**What was your general camp like around when you were working on the airstrip?**

On the airstrip we had ponchos stretched over bamboo and we had stakes driven into the ground with forks in them, made up and we cut bamboo slats very thin and laid across them and that was your bed.

07:30 And one of the things they used to do for a bit of fun, they used to get a lot of scorpions and centipedes up there and they were very, very big ones and one of the thrills for something to do I suppose they put one of each in a kerosene tin and watched the fight. I've never seen scorpions so big in all my life. They were huge things and would you believe the centipede always wins?

08:00 **How?**

Apparently the local native says the centipede [scorpion] for some reason or other commits suicide. He bites himself and that was their version. I don't know how true that was but while we were there they parachuted some Foster's Beer into us and we were sitting in the middle of the Perak River trying to get it cold but it wasn't very palatable I might add,

08:30 but it was better than nothing. And another day they turned our stomachs up a bit because they parachuted our rations into the Ghurkhas and the Ghurkha's rations into us and their's is goat's meat that is usually turning green and whatever so they came down river and we swapped over the rations and for a cans of Foster's we got a couple of bottles of Ghurkha's rum so that was all very nice.

**And what were the Ghurkha's like when you met up with them?**

They were good blokes,

09:00 yeah, yeah. Only little fellows, yeah, they were good. On that trip I was telling you about that I did when we bought the trucks back from Singapore, we met up with a Ghurkha band there and they had an English warrant officer with them in charge of them and all they wanted to do was buy us drinks because we were Australian. They were top blokes. Actually I was in hospital with them at one stage of the game.

**What makes them such good soldiers?**

09:30 Well it comes down through their families. See the British Army incorporated Ghurkhas I don't know how long ago, well over a hundred and something odd years, when they were in India and it becomes a tradition in the male members of the Ghurkha's family to be members of the British Army and they're very, very proud of that. But one of the things you never do is teach a Ghurkha to drive

10:00 because the first battalion that went over there, don't quote me but I think I'm pretty right, they had a Ghurkha service corps driving trucks and one of them turned it over and I think two Australian Diggers and an officer were killed in that one. But the only way they could get the Ghurkha's to keep distance in their trucks they used to get a Texta pen and draw a square on the windscreen so when they were driving along when the front of the, the back of the truck fitted in that square on your windscreen

10:30 that was the distance you kept. And it works too.

**And when you were coming up the river on your way up to the airstrip, the canoes that you were in, can you describe them for me?**

Well they were a long timber looking thing about probably from here to the front wall of the house long, very narrow, and I'm not sure if they were carved out of tree trunks or whether they were clinker

11:00 built but anyway they were pretty rugged but they were alright but I can tell you this much it was a very big thrill coming back down through the rapids. And another thing that was in the back of our mind was a few days before us the Ghurkha's came down and they lost two, drowned. One of the boats turned over as Ghurkha's can't swim as they lived up in the mountains in Nepal and there is no big water holes there. There is plenty of water there but it's all running downhill, if you know what I mean.

11:30 **What would you sit on in the canoes?**

They had piece of board across and what we used to do is put our equipment on the floor and a bandolier around your neck and we used a British Army 303 Carbine which is only a little short fella.

**And how stable were the canoes?**

Weren't too bad. You wouldn't want to stand up and start jumping around in one but no, they

12:00 weren't too bad. They were about that wide I suppose.

**And how was the motor sort of attached to?**

Well they built a, well the thing that normally an outboard motor sits on is a transom and that's what it's called and they sort of had a flat piece built out on the back of them, not like the ones they've got in, you might have seen them in Thailand. They've got one with a big,

12:30 long thing out the back. Now these were just, yeah they were, they were Johnson outboard motors.

**And what was the general terrain like on the edge of the river?**

You could see about, in most places you could probably see from about here to the other side of the road but it was still good enough to get a good shot at you if there was anybody in there. You wouldn't see them. It was very thick.

**Would you have to watch out for any wildlife or anything?**

13:00 Yeah, there is elephants in the jungle or there was in those days and there is tigers in there. One thing that gives you a bit of a shock sometimes at night and it just sounds like a machine gun going off, when the bamboo gets wet it falls over and it goes bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, as it comes down and occasionally if there is a tiger around you can smell it but normally they won't come near you.

**What do they**

13:30 **smell like?**

Oh just a funny, musty smell. I couldn't describe it but I had it pointed out to me but we used to always move around with a weapon within reach.

**And this night that you had to stay on the sandbank tell me about how you sort of set up the guard and the perimeter?**

Oh we all had luminous watches and we just did a couple of hours each and then you'd wake the next bloke up, that's

14:00 all, we just took it in turns but you slept pretty lightly.

**And why do you think that, you mentioned that you weren't sure whether it was a problem with the motor or your guide, why do you think that?**

I don't trust people of the oriental race.

**And generally how did you get on with the ones say that were working with the army?**

14:30 Oh they were okay, you got on alright with them but see these people were ones that we didn't know and they were locals from up around the Grik area so you would never know and the CT's, the communist terrorists were only just across the border, Chin Peng and all his mob, so you don't know whether they had them in their pockets or not. I mean see in the, later I'll talk about they have curfews, all the villagers or kampongs as they are called are all surrounded

15:00 by barbed wire, so you've got to be inside at a certain time and you can't come outside in the morning before a certain time. And the thing about it is if you catch somebody outside you run him in because you don't know and they're very good at carrying rations out to the CT. They used to carry it out in push bike frames, French letters [condoms] inserted

15:30 in the right place, all sorts of things like that. They'll try anything.

**Did you ever have to search people?**

No, they usually, they used the Malay policewomen for that.

**And what was the purpose of the airstrip that was being built?**

Oh it was just a logistic sort of thing I would say. We were not told about that but you assume that's what it's for because it was a well known fact that the terrorists

16:00 were across the border in Thailand and technically you weren't supposed to go in after them but they used to do little sneaky across occasionally and chase them and they used to come across on our side of course. I was lucky enough not to see any.

**So given that you were close to the border what were the defences around the airstrip like?**

Airstrip? Oh we just dug a few foxholes the place and that sort of thing so if anything did happen you'd just jump in them and we had Bren guns

16:30 mounted in positions because where we were in the camp itself it was on the, the riverbank in that particular area was very high and they had a pump down the bottom, a Briggs and Stratton or something I think it was and they used hollow bamboo to pump water up to the camp in a pump, so anybody trying to get at you had to come across the strip or come up the bank behind you anyway and

you'd hear and see them because we all stood guard at night.

17:00 So you'd know if they were going to do it but the risk was fairly slight I think.

**And what sort of facilities did you have up there in terms of to have a shower or to have a wash?**

A bucket and a bit of water and a bar of soap and the latrine was dug by a shovel, sit across a stick.

17:30 **And aside from these scorpion and centipede fights, what else would you have up there to entertain you?**

Not much really because when it went dark you went to bed virtually, if it wasn't your turn to stand guard because we didn't run the risk of putting lights on of any sort on because that is looking for somebody to take a pot shot at you because a cigarette can be seen over a distance of seven miles.

**Were you allowed to smoke?**

At night normally you didn't, no.

18:00 **And how was it you ended up doing this work with this unit?**

I don't know, my boss put me in for it I suppose. They must have thought I was a good looking bloke. No, I don't know. I suppose they thought I was one of the more experienced NCO's so they sent me up there. They didn't do it to get rid of me.

**And as an NCO up there was the kind of work you were doing slightly different?**

No, exactly the same as everybody

18:30 else, no everyone worked, that's the engineers, that's the way they worked.

**And were there any British up there as well?**

In our area, no, it was just an Australian setup. Oh there was British there when they crashed.

**How was that area chosen for the airstrip?**

Out of my sphere, out of my sphere, upper echelon job that one.

**When you got up there what was in the area previously?**

19:00 Well they had been up there, the engineers that were there, there was another troop or half a troop actually that were there before we got there and we just sort of reinforced them and they cleared most of it and the only big, really big job in relation to stopping an aeroplane crashing there was one big huge tree right at the end of it so they put some gun cotton down around that and blew it down. But as for the rest of it, I think originally they got a lot of the

19:30 locals from up around that area, the natives, and cut most of it down because it was all down when we got there but it was definitely cut straight out of the jungle but usually they pick an area that is lightly foliated to do that sort of thing.

**And how long did you spend up there in total?**

About six weeks.

**And before you'd been sent up there whereabouts were you based?**

Butterworth.

20:00 **What was Butterworth like?**

Butterworth was a base camp and that had attap huts, long huts in a coconut plantation so it consisted of the accommodation area on one side of the road, the engineers were next door to us and when we weren't out on operations or whatever that's where we spent our time in there but it was quite comfortable.

**Can you describe the attap huts?**

An attap hut? There is pictures of them there somewhere.

20:30 An attap hut is a long hut, built out of usually bush timber, round timbers with a concrete floor and the frame is the same sort of thing and what they do is they put Hessian over it first, over the top and then the attap is the palm fronds one over the other and whether the walls are usually only about that high so that when the sides come down there is a gap between the wall and the roof and the roof comes

21:00 down to within about that far of the ground so that allows circulation through the hut. The reason for the Hessian in them and they used to pull them to bits about every four months is because there was so many geckos that they used to get so heavy with gecko poo that you had to pull them down and change them over. That's a lot of geckos.

**Do geckos make noises?**

Yes.

21:30 I've got them here, chip, chip, chip, chip.

**Any other creepy crawlies in there?**

Not really, not what we saw but down where we were we were only about from here to the shop away from the, oh might have been a bit further than that, from the passage between George Town, Butterworth type thing and Penang and there was water from across there and you'd get the odd sea snake down on the beach but they don't come ashore.

22:00 Usually they're pretty sick when they come in but that's about all we ever saw. We had a bit of a boat club going there, a second hand boat. I actually rebuild one on the first trip.

**Tell me about that?**

Well I just built it. It had been damaged and they had a motor there doing nothing, an outboard motor that the previous outfit before us had bought and it was okay so I spent quite a lot of time up there

22:30 repairing the hull, took it for a couple of trips and it went alright and that's a funny story, that one. There was a New Zealand frigate came in, and they came over and visited us at our camp and so anyway they went back that night and there was two of them flaked out somewhere so I said "Don't worry about it, I'll take you back to your boat in my boat".

23:00 So we saddled up and away we went the next morning, these two New Zealand Navy blokes and myself and we got over to there and they were doing something like pulling flags up or doing something onboard their silly looking prawn trawler thing, whatever it was and you weren't allowed to come onboard while they were doing it and in the meantime this boat sprung a leak. And I thought "this is getting pretty serious" so I headed back to sure and it must have been pretty humorous watching it from the shore, with two Kiwi

23:30 sailors madly bailing this boat out with their hats and we got to within about fifteen feet of the shore and then plug, it sunk. So they had to find another way of getting the Kiwi's back.

**And was the end of your boat?**

I didn't worry about that boat anymore. I think I'd done enough work on it but the air force used to have a boat club up there where they were,

24:00 the air force, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and RAF [Royal Air Force], some RAF up there, had their own boat club up there and they used to have a fine old time with the Malay customs because they used to go, they had some pretty good boats because they were there all the time, not like us. They had some pretty good boats, they had some pretty fast ones because they used to go across to Penang and buy duty free stuff and instead of coming back on the Penang ferry they'd put it on the boats and outrun the customs blokes coming back and they had a fine old time.

24:30 **What did the customs blokes, what was their role?**

Well they were customs and we were supposed to, see Penang was duty free and Malaya wasn't, so when you landed you had to pay duty on it so to avoid paying duty on it they had their fast speed boats and they used to smuggle it into the air force base that way, so the Malay blokes used to chase them around the place to try and catch them and a couple of times they had to hurl it over the side but most blokes I know got through with it.

25:00 Transistor radios, watches, and that sort of stuff.

**What was the general sort of atmosphere like at Butterworth?**

Quite relaxed, the canteen was open every night, pictures of it there somewhere. In fact when we were in camp, quite relaxed. Just did our normal maintenance duties through the day, make sure the guns were ready to fire and the trucks were ready to use, all that sort

25:30 of stuff. But they had a set up where you normally only worked until a bit after lunch, when you were in base camp, and mostly the canteen opened about lunchtime and you'd have a couple of beers and then close again and then you were left to yourself, go and have a sleep mainly.

**Did you have to do any sorts of patrols or anything around this area?**

Not in that area, no. It was a white area and what they call a white area. It just had a big sign up on the fence

26:00 which said "barenti" and it had a figure of a bloke with a rifle on it and barenti means "stop" or you'll get shot.

**How did you get along with the British troops?**

Never had a hell of a lot to do with them. The only time we used to have a bit of a problem with them is

if you went into the Boston Bar or some of these other places they had a terrible habit of turning the jukeboxes

26:30 up so loud you couldn't even think so an Australian would go and turn it down and a Pommy would go and turn it up and the next minute there would be a punch up. I remember one night they got rather upset about it so they hurled it out of a second storey window and nearly killed the boy but it was nice and quiet after that.

**Who hurled it out?**

Some unnamed Australians.

**Were you there?**

Yeah.

27:00 Don't look at me like that, I'm perfectly innocent. The Kiwis did a better one down at Ti Ping. It was too loud so they wheeled it into a fish pond and it didn't work too good then.

**You weren't a fan of loud music?**

No, and I'm still not. Most Australians of that era weren't.

**Did you ever get in any sort of repercussion problems from what happened to the juke box?**

27:30 I wasn't a Kiwi.

**How about when it fell out the window?**

Oh I don't know who did that, no idea, no idea.

**Were there any particular quirks that British soldiers had that you observed?**

Well they used to be a bit down on us because we were higher paid than them of course and we could spend a bit more money, that sort of thing but we used to usually avoid them and do our own sort of thing. I saw one instance

28:00 where the Garrison Club, which used to be in Penang, which was open to everybody sort of thing, it was run by the Pommy NAAFI; Navy, Army, Air Force Institute, and there was a little Pommy air force bloke kept turning the juke box up and a bloke by the name of Tank Harris, a big Kiwi, oh he was a huge bloke, and walked over and grabbed him by the lapel in one hand and sat him on the juke box and turned it down and said "Stay there little man or I'll break your neck."

28:30 He was still sitting there two hours later.

**How did you get on with the New Zealanders then?**

Alright, great, yeah, no problems, the Kiwis were great. They used to have a little setup where they used to run around with a little can of paint and a cut off shaving brush so it had fairly stiff bristles on it and they used to have a, they used to sneak into your camp and they used to put little red

29:00 Kiwis all over the place, with a stencil, over your vehicles and your guns and doors and things like that, so our blokes used to sneak in with a white one, no, their's was a white Kiwi, that's right and ours was a little red kangaroo and you'd put little red kangaroos all over things. And the battalion made the mistake of parking one of their Land Rovers in the Kiwi camp one day at Ti Ping and they came out and it was completely

29:30 painted white, wheels, tyres, steering wheel, seats, bonnet, windscreen, the lot. So the Australians, I assume it was the Australians made a foray into the New Zealander's camp shortly after that and they had a stuffed Kiwi in the sergeants' mess and they pinched it and that nearly started the third world war. So it was suggested by the hierarchy that somebody should return this Kiwi before there was serious repercussions

30:00 so it was returned.

**Did you have anything to do with that?**

Definitely not, I wasn't even there. No. We played them football one night. I went down there to do a leadership course, something to do and it was run by one of the religious outfits so we had to go across to the Kiwi canteen and do a quality control on the product they had

30:30 and making a lot of noise and the foolish orderly officer was silly enough to come down and try and quiet people down so they all got thrown in the creek, the whole lot of the guard of course and so while they were away they turned out all of the lights so they decided they'd have a game of football, the Aussies and the Kiwis. And football fields there were like a kunai grass, cut you to

31:00 pieces if you fell on it so we were playing in the pouring rain and that much water on the ground and the only way you could tell an Aussie from a Kiwi was if his shorts fell down and you saw a big, white

backside. If he was a black one you tackled him and if it was a white one you left him alone, good fun, very sore next morning.

**What kind of football?**

Normal football, half the time you didn't know who had it so you tackled him anyway.

**Was it AFL [Australian Rules] or league or?**

Who cares? There was

31:30 about forty a side.

**Who won?**

I don't know. Absolutely no idea. Yeah, funny place Ti Ping, one of the highest rainfalls in the South East Asian area and there is a shortage of water. You could put your watch on it, it would rain at half past four every afternoon.

**Why was there a shortage of water?**

They didn't have any storage facilities.

32:00 I doubt if it would be like that now of course. That's going back a long while.

**How long did you spend at Ti Ping?**

That particular trip oh it was a seven day course. I didn't learn much off the God botherers but anyway we had a lot of fun. That was the first time I ever saw a red headed Indian. Well there is a lot of Indians in Malaya

32:30 and something funny happened there.

**Did you get to go out much in Ti Ping?**

No, no, didn't go out on the town. It was good enough to stay in camp, had enough fun there.

**During your time in Malaya did you ever get into any kind of trouble at all?**

Who me? Why would you suggest a thing like that?

33:00 The only time I got into trouble was when I was attached to the British Armoured Corps.

**What happened?**

I was minding my own business.

**How exactly were you doing that?**

I was in an out of bounds area in Ipoh, some friends of mine and myself. Actually what happened was another one of my detachments, we had armoured cars, small, like a dingo they called them, like a ferret and

33:30 the British equivalent and we used to guard our convoys when you moved with these armoured cars so the Brits were short of armoured cars. They were doing curfew patrols around the area and they were doing food convoys up to the Thai border and they knew we had these cars, we had four of them. So they asked for the four cars and crews to go down so they put me in charge and down we went.

34:00 And we were down there probably about, I don't know, about three weeks or something and the Brits have got a dry based camp. They don't have grog. The Australians do so there was a, the chap in charge, a Major Stock, a terribly nice bloke, a Pommy bloke and he'd been attached as a military attaché here in Australia and he had a real lot of time for Australians. He liked Australians so I went to him and I said "Look,

34:30 my blokes have asked me how we can get a beer?" I said "You're running a dry show [there is no alcohol] here" and he said "What can you get a beer anywhere?" He said "If you can", he said "I am aware of the fact that you fellows do this" and he said "If you can get some" and they have what they call a 'charwaller'. They were usually Pakistani's and they run a egg and chip van and soft drinks and

35:00 toothpaste and stuff like that and like a canteen type thing and he said "You can keep it cool in there." I said "fair enough" and I said "I'll duck across to the Australian Infantry Unit" and my cousin who finished up in the army as a major was driving me and I was sitting up in the turret and so we drove into the Australian Army camp and I couldn't even get back in the scout car when we left there because we had a few cans of beer. So we took it all over and we put it in the charwaller and a couple of days later, oh probably the next day later I think it was

35:30 they had a delegation of our English counterparts and they went to the boss and said "Hey, what about us having a beer?" And he said called me up and he said "Do you think you could sell my boys some beer?" And I said "Yeah, not a problem", so he saw me a few days later and he said "You've turned my whole unit into a bunch of drunks Jack." The boys were happy and that was okay so we didn't take any



civilian clothes with us and most times when you went on leave in the cities and towns and places, if you went

36:00 on leave in civilian clothes. So anyway he said "Do you blokes want a bit of leave?" And I said "Yeah, my word." He said "You can into Ipoh" and Ipoh is a beautiful little town. It's got the, a thing in there, just in passing, it's the biggest reclining Buddha in the world, huge. You can see a Buddha up there somewhere only he's laying on his side like this, with a big smile on his face. It's absolutely huge, but that's just in passing.

36:30 So I said "We've got no civilian clothes" and he said "No, I'll give you all a pass to go in uniform." So we went in and did over a couple of bars and then said to a Thai shaw boy "How about taking us to a, somewhere else a bit quieter?" And he said "Oh yeah, no trouble." So away we went and it was a red light area, out of bounds of course. Anyway we were minding our own business, having a few drinks, whatever, and the next minute

37:00 somebody screams out "provos." So I was sitting like where I am and there was a door there and all my boys were sitting around the place and the door flew open, the front door and we were in the next room and they all shot through, out the back door, other than the two that were over this way from me and up on the roof and got away. So the door flew back and I stood up and I was standing behind it and anyway they grabbed the two blokes that were standing there and then the next minute this Corporal Crumb was his name.

37:30 I always remember. He was a tall, red headed Pommy, with pock marks all over his face and about six foot four, straight up and down like a bean pole and he must have thought "oh" and he pulled the door back and "G'day, how you going?" He went "Come on, come on mate" and out I go and I was just walking out to the jeep and they had two Aussie provos with them too. And I'm just walking along and he decided I wasn't walking fast enough so he decided

38:00 he was going to man handle me so that was the biggest mistake he ever made.

**What did he do to you?**

I will tell you this much about it, every time he has a shave he'll remember me.

**What did you do to him?**

He fell on the floor and went to sleep.

**Why?**

Something he tripped over I think.

**Why every time he has a shave will he think of you?**

Because he had a nose that was spread all over his face

38:30 that wound up on the end of my knee. I am not proud of it but he shouldn't have put his hand on me.

**What did he do to you?**

Well he threw his arm up my back as he reckoned I wasn't walking fast enough.

**What happens to you if you react like that towards them?**

Well he lost interest in things for quite some time and the two Aussie provo's said "That's the nicest piece of work that I have

39:00 seen for a long time." So they put us in the jeep and threw us in gaol and asked us what unit we were from and I told them and they said "What Australians with the British Armoured Corps?" And I said "Yeah." So they took us down to the 13/18th [Royal] Hussars Base Camp, main base camp at Ipoh and put us in gaol. So I said "Ring Major Stocker up and tell him what is going on" and so they ran and they said "He wants to talk to you." So I went over

39:30 and I spoke to him and told him what happened and he said "You were a foolish boy weren't you?" I said "Yeah" and he said "Put me back onto the officer that was there" and I don't know what he said to him but he said "Righto, you can go." So we left and we called a cab and the Pommy orderly sergeant said "Where are you going?" And I said "Back to where we just come from" and he said "Yeah, you bloody Aussies, you're all mad."

40:00 So anyway the culmination of that story after having spent three months with the British down there back in my camp I had to front for assaulting the provo.

## Tape 6

00:36 And he said "Where are you going to?" And I said "Oh we're going back to where we've just come from"

and he said "You Australians are all mad", so anyway I don't know where we went from there, somewhere, but anyway we went back to the gaffer's estate, where the Hussars were

01:00 and I got back there and the boss called me in and asked me what happened and he said "Oh well he was a foolish bloke, wasn't he to put his hands on you?" He wasn't worried about it and anyway we just continued on doing the convoy escorts, they were civilian vehicles.

**And I want to ask you about the British gaol, what was the setup like in there?**

Oh the same as a normal military gaol, the same as a civilian one virtually. It was a permanent sort set up and had been there for years. It was no hassle.

01:30 We were only in there for about I suppose the maximum of ten minutes, fifteen minutes or something, wasn't long.

**And what was the red light area like?**

All it was was an out of bounds bar really, that's all it was and there was a Chinese bloke running the place and he had fighting fish in there in little tanks and bar girls running around the place and etcetera, etcetera.

**What were the fighting fish? What happens with them?**

Siamese fighting fish,

02:00 haven't you heard of them? They are beautifully coloured things and they are all different, long tails, short tails, and whatever and what they do is they have them in separate tanks as they will fight each other all the time and you keep them like goldfish and in a lot of places, and I believe they still do it, they just put a fish in a tank and they toss another one in there and they have a bet on which one is going to win, like cock fighting. It's an Asiatic type thing.

02:30 **Did you ever get into this and gambling and stuff?**

No, not my scene but they are beautiful fish. There is no doubt about that, they are absolutely magnificent, they are only little fellows but my God they fight. They rip each other to bits.

**And what were the bar girls like?**

Pretty good, pretty good.

**What would they say in a conversation?**

Oh they spoke English alright, those that didn't, I wasn't too worried if they didn't because I can understand more Malay than I can speak anyway.

03:00 As a matter of a fact we used to have a, when we were in the catering game we had a girl from Penang working for us and she and I used to get in there and talk in Malay and the other girls working for us used to reckon we were talking about them but it wasn't, I was just practising my Malay and she thought it was wonderful that I could speak a bit of Malay.

**Can you still speak some?**

Oh a little bit, yeah. You get out of practise, like everything else. I've got a mate of mine who is a fully fledged German and he was in the Australian Army and he used to get around, he and his friends, he was an engineer, and

03:30 got in the Australian Army and they'd be all talking German and I could understand more than I could speak. I had a pretty fair idea what they were talking about. They used to forget and start talking in German.

**And what were the bars, how would it operate?**

Oh just like a normal bar we've got here, tables and chairs around the place in a bar and you can go up and get a drink or sometimes they'd bring it round to you, just depends on what sort of bar you went into. A lot of them were just like an old English pub, you stand up at the bar or sit on

04:00 bar stools, whatever.

**Why were they out of bounds?**

Well usually because they had the wrong sort of girls in those places and they had a high VD [venereal disease] rate and things like that but it all happened before we got there anyway but Australians being what they are if you tell them they can't go somewhere they go there anyway.

**And if you wanted to go with one of the girls, where would you go?**

Oh plenty of rooms, yeah

04:30 no trouble.

**And how was that operated? Would you have to pay the barman?**

Yeah.

**And so tell us about this Major Stocker, what was he like?**

He was a real good bloke, a real good bloke, yeah. As I said he had a lot of time for Australians but I never saw terribly much of him but when I had to I was the boss of the Australians there and he always came and saw me and if he didn't

05:00 he'd send one of his sergeants in. Speaking of his sergeants I'll get to the bath parade. The British Army have an acute old habit where some of them are very loath to use soap and water. The best place to hide your money from the Pommies over there was to put it under a bar of soap. That was the saying we had but anyway, haven't heard that one before? But anyway this sergeant came in one day and we had three tents where my blokes were

05:30 and he said "Come on you blokes you've got to go on bath parade." I said "What? What are you talking about? Bath parade?" He said "oh yeah, twice a week we have bath parade". And I said "What do you mean, bath parade?" And he said "We march them all out and they've got to go the showers" and I said "Settle down mate, we're Australians and we go once, sometimes twice a day every day, and no worries at all." I said "Just hang on a minute" so I went up and saw Stocker and he said to him "Just leave them alone" and that was the finish of the bath parade but that's the setup they had in the British Army.

06:00 **And with this provo that you dropped, did you ever think...**

He fell over!

**Yeah, well whatever happened, did you ever, did it seem unusual that you got kind of clear of it? Or what actually did happen to you? What was your punishment in the long run?**

A slap on the wrist virtually. Well he shouldn't have put his hands on me in the first place and the other provos that were with him were witness to the fact that what he had done was uncalled for

06:30 and I wasn't resisting arrest, I wasn't doing anything. I was just walking along but he was pretty well renowned for that and Pommy Red Caps were very bad for that. Just a normal bloke out after, see in certain areas that you went to you had to be inside a building after say ten o'clock. I forget what exact time it was and if they caught a bloke out there rather than just say "Get yourself inside", they beat him up with a bloody night stick and things like this. They weren't very nice people at all.

07:00 Meatheads they were called.

**And did it seem unusual that they didn't stick together and try and get you into trouble?**

Well there was two Australian provos there and obviously on my side and they didn't like him either. I don't think his mate did either. They usually travel around in fours. The New Zealanders didn't have a provo corps. They used to delegate certain people to go and work with the provos. That big Tank Harris, that I spoke about earlier on he was one of those and

07:30 he could walk into a place and say "Calm down boys" and that would be the finish of that because no-one would pick him. He was a man mountain and a very nice bloke.

**So tell us how did you come to be with the British Armoured Unit?**

I don't know, they sent me there. In fact I was one of the few NCO's that ever did get attached to a British Army unit and they're usually pretty careful who they send to those sort of places,

08:00 not that I'm putting a feather in my own cap but if you haven't got the experience you don't get the job but if you can't be depended on you don't go.

**Well why did they need an Australian to join them?**

Because of the fact that we had these armoured cars and we took our own crews down in the armoured cars. They were short of armoured cars to do these patrols and the food convoys up north.

**And were your armoured cars different to the British ones?**

Yeah, yeah, ours were the Dingo. There's some photographs somewhere there. They

08:30 were originally made by the Brit's and Canada and for the Second World War and I don't know if you've seen the Ferret or not but they're very similar to a Ferret. They were just a small scout car with a thirty calibre machine gun sticking out the turret and they had one it was like a thing they called a field mouse and it was an armoured car with no turret on it and they had twin Bren guns on the top. And you had like

09:00 a bike handle bar and you squeezed the handles and that fired the Bren guns and you could move it wherever you wanted and you could fire one or you could fire two.

**And where would you be patrolling here?**

In and around the areas around Ipoh. We used to go around all the rubber plantations and places like that because they had to be out of the rubber plantations at four o'clock in the afternoon because of the

fact that there

09:30 was always suspicion that they were supplying rations and stuff to the bad guys in the bush. And I made myself very unpopular one time there. I was in that big scout car there and I had two of those and two, at that stage in time our armoured cars were all broken down so they put me in charge of this Pommy outfit and we went through there one day and I got twenty five of them in one hit

10:00 at half past five at night so we made them pile all on top of the armoured cars, push bikes and all their gear and took them into the local town and give them to the police and they weren't very impressed with that but they were out after the curfew, end of story.

**And did you ever come across danger?**

Not as such, no, not really but

10:30 there was always that chance though, always that chance because we were usually always patrolled right up until dark and then went back to the base camp and when you're travelling after dark in any sort of an army vehicle, there is a chance that you could get attacked. A hand grenade rolled underneath you or something like that could happen but no, we were lucky, never got anything like that. The only dangerous one I really go into was we went into a kampong one day

11:00 and I forget what we were there for. We were checking on something and anyway this Chinese Malay bloke came up to me and he had this cloth wrapped bundle and he said "Here sahib, I give you this" and I said "What is it? Put it on the ground." And he said "You look, you look" and I said "Okay" and I couldn't speak Chinese and he wasn't real flash on Malay and I unrolled

11:30 it and it had two live mortar bombs in it and I grabbed hold of the local headman and I said "Where did he get these from?" And he took me over and showed me, they'd been buried God knows since the Second World War probably. I don't know and I thought "Well I can't leave them here, I've got to take them back" and they were pretty mangy looking things. And I thought the only thing I can do, we had sandbags so I filled sandbags up and put them on the front of, well to one

12:00 side of the vehicle and put the mortar bombs on top of the sandbags and piled more sandbags on and tied them on and took them back. And I rolled into camp this night with these one and Major Stocker nearly had a heart attack. He said "You bloody fool, you could have got killed" and I said "I couldn't leave them there could I?" And he said "No, you've got a point I suppose." So I left the armoured car where it was that night with a guard on it and the next morning the engineers came in and

12:30 they took them up the bush and blew them up, blew a hell of a hole in the bloody ground. So that was close.

**How stressful was that situation?**

Oh well you don't worry too much, somebody has got to do it and as I said you couldn't leave them there.

**And what were you noticing about differences in the way the British Army operated?**

The British Army operates, in my opinion, I don't know what they're like now, but

13:00 we sort of considered it a sort of blind obedience. If you told a British soldier to stand on a corner and wait there until he was relieved and the enemy comes up, he wouldn't shoot through. He'd stay there and get run over and an Australian soldier normally, I'm going back to the old days, has got a bit of incentive and says "this is a bit dangerous, I might leave here" and get out of it. The Brits discipline is completely different to ours, in that manner, that's what I saw of it.

13:30 Because they couldn't get used to the same setup as we were walking around calling NCO's by their first names and this sort of thing. A classic example of the Brit system is I was walking up the road one day and I was a bombardier at the time and this British Army officer, a lieutenant, came along and he's got hair hanging down over his collar, like they all were. They tell everybody else to get a haircut but they didn't get one themselves and he walked past, well he was over there somewhere and he screamed out

14:00 "Jewell" and I just ignored him, "Jewell", and I still ignored him. "I am talking to you" and still ignored him and the next minute he ran up and grabbed me by the shirt and he said "I am talking to you Jewell". He knew my name of course and I said "with all due respect sir, in the Australian Army we are addressed by our rank, not our surname" and saluted him, turned my back on him and walked away. Anyway the boss called me in the next

14:30 morning and he said "I don't know what we're going to do with you" and I said "Why?" And he said "I just heard what you did to that", I can't think of his name, this Pommy bloke, and I said "what I'm saying is right, isn't it?" And he said "well yes, but you could have been a bit more diplomatic though" and I said "I didn't feel like it at the time." Anyway after that all British officers called Australian troops by their rank.

**Well after you finished your time with the British, where did you go to after this?**

- 15:00 Back to Butterworth and shortly after that we did the big Merdeka [Freedom] Parade, which was the end of the confrontation which was in July, August, I think in 1960. Yes, it was around about then, might have been a bit later, I'm not sure and they held a huge parade that the Malays had their independence from the Poms and all that sort of thing and we went down to Kuala Lumpur
- 15:30 for that, did that one and we went back to Butterworth and shortly after that we moved back to Malacca. We moved out of that camp into a nice brand new camp that had been built down there for the 28th Commonwealth Brigade. Nice brick buildings and stuff like that and we stayed there until we went home.
- 16:00 We were by the way a part of the 17th Ghurkha Division. A lot of people didn't know that so we were with 28th Commonwealth Brigade, which was an integral part of 17th Ghurkha Division.

**Why were you part of that?**

Well the Division was the 17th Ghurkha Division and we were part of it and the 28th Commonwealth Brigade consisted of the New Zealanders, the British, the Australians and at one stage I think they had

- 16:30 Fijians there and they also had 22 SAS, the Brits, they were there.

**And what was your kind of daily tasks or role in this period down at Malacca?**

Malacca we mainly did, because we were getting close to coming then anyway, we mainly did normal maintenance tasks, we did exercises with

- 17:00 the Ghurkhas themselves, out in the scrub, that sort of thing and we lost one bloke. He died from leptospirosis and that is a rat born disease and you pick it up in water and it eats all your insides out. That was a bit nasty because we had to take him in from the scrub into a Malay hospital, actually Malay come Chinese, but there was more Malays there but we were a little bit lucky. There was one Chinese doctor who was there and he was looking after him but
- 17:30 ultimately, Lionel Tucker his name was, and he died but they wouldn't touch him and we had to go and get him and put him in the coffin and take him out of there and ultimately a funeral was held in Kuala Lumpur Military Cemetery for him. That was another job, we copped them all the time, those funerals. The infantry blokes killed an Eban tracker one day. He apparently ducked round behind a patrol and he stuck his head up and somebody [shot] it off.
- 18:00 He wasn't supposed to be there so we had to do that one. I did three or four funerals while I was other there. That was another job I always copped too.

**What did you have to do exactly?**

What you do is you have your normal gun tractor, which is the GMC truck, which is usually done up all nice and smick and then they have a gun similar to that. Yeah, they did, they had one of those. They take the shield off it and they have a platform on it and the barrel is down level and the coffin sits on top and you take them to the cemetery

- 18:30 on that and do a military funeral.

**And so tell us about coming home?**

Coming home, Malaya. Yes, I was in the rear party there and a lot of people were flown home and most of the single blokes we all stayed behind

- 19:00 with 103 Battery, which relieved us and as a matter of fact in passing a bloke by the name of [Peter] Badcoe was the battery captain of 103 Battery and he was the Badcoe VC [Victoria Cross] from Vietnam, a little fellow with glasses and he was a mad infantier and he liked infantry tactics and he apparently transferred to the Corps of Infantry and he was never in the
- 19:30 Royal Australian Regiment incidentally. A lot of people don't know that, he was Corps of Infantry and he went to Vietnam and got killed and got a VC, that's just in passing. Actually I had a drink with him in Malacca before I left. Some of us, he came into a bar one day and we all had a bit of a drink with him. And we hopped on the Flaminia, see that thing over there, which was an Italian, had been an Italian immigrant ship.
- 20:00 And the history of it was that it was [Benito] Mussolini's yacht. It wasn't a real big thing and it was pointed out to us by the crew where half the superstructure had been blown off it in the Second World War and it had been rebuilt and they used it to bring Italian immigrants out to Australia, all part of history and we came home on that. And I spent most of my time up in the crew's quarters drinking
- 20:30 Italian wine and eating Italian food. Yeah, trying to sing Italian songs half drunk and quite happy to be coming home. And we sat all the way home until we came down and then everybody had a portable radio on and we were having bets on how was going to pick up the first Australian radio station. I don't know who won it, yeah.

- 21:00 **And what did it feel like to return?**

Pretty good, we landed in Sydney and most of us were throwing contraband cigarettes over to our relatives over on the wharf. I had none and a lot of people had relatives there and my cousin, his father was there and he and I were very good friends and the married people, we were pretty upset about it, quite frankly, because a lot of us lived in Sydney and around those areas but

21:30 all the married blokes they let them go away with their families and they took us on a, in buses out to Eastern Command Personnel Depot, which was at Rushcutter's Bay, gave us a feed, in a bus and took us back and threw us straight on the train and sent us to Brisbane, so we weren't very impressed with that. And we were stuck in Brisbane for a matter of about three weeks before they let us go on leave after we came home

22:00 but then I spent a fortnight at Kings Cross and had a ball.

**What did you get up to at Kings Cross?**

I refuse to commit myself.

**Fair enough. Were there any celebrations or parades or?**

When we came home? No, no.

**Did anyone at home seem to know what had gone on?**

Malaya was one of those things that, I don't know, well I wasn't here. Well I was here when other the other blokes went over in front of us but nothing much was ever

22:30 said about it apart from when somebody got hurt, because we lost a few, killed, over there, infantry battalion mainly. We lost one bloke in 105 Battery. He was involved in one accident, apparently hit a water buffalo or something and pretty gory thing and I was talking to one of the blokes that was in the Land Rover with him and he said his head went straight through, chopped his throat straight through the windscreen and they had two, 105 had two killed and we had one.

23:00 Yeah and one of ours we had a very bad casualty, bloke broke down in a Land Rover one day and a bull water buffalo took a dislike to the bloody thing and wrecked it, kept charging it and punching holes through it. A casualty of war, one broken Land Rover,

23:30 attacked by a water buffalo.

**So did you talk to anyone back home about your experiences over in Malaya?**

Not really, no. The only relatives I had were up in Dubbo. My father was up there. As I mentioned earlier on he had been let out of the army and he was living up there and I went and saw him, that was only briefly and then I just came back down to Sydney,

24:00 and spent a bit of leave as I said up at the Cross and then jumped the train back up to Brisbane and I've virtually been here ever since.

**And what was your next kind of work with the army?**

I was then posted to 1 Field Regiment which was at Wacol and I was a transport bombardier with one of the troops in 101 Battery and I

24:30 went down pretty badly with bronchitis and they temporarily put me up in RHQ [Regimental] Headquarters in a transport sergeant's job up there and I heard of a job going in a CMF unit, the 11th Field Regiment at Annerley and I thought "that sounds a good job for me" and I applied for it. Initially it was to be a storeman's job and I knew as much about being a storeman as I did about

25:00 flying a Boeing 707 and anyway I put in for it and in the meantime one of the other blokes that was in the unit applied for a transfer that was in the transport game and so they took me in the posting in the transport bit of the Q [quartermasters] store, which didn't worry me one little bit. And I was posted there and they sent me away to, the job there actually was training CMF drivers and

25:30 it wasn't a bad job except it was nearly a seven day a week job because of the number of people they had in those depots in those days and they were forever doing courses of all sorts and if you weren't doing those you were out on shoots up in Tin Can Bay and it was virtually seven days a week. But I didn't mind the camps and I ultimately got promoted to sergeant while

26:00 I was in the job and we used to do a lot of trips up to Tin Can Bay and they were quite good because we always used to go up and put the camp up for the CMF blokes and in doing so I was in charge of the full transport show and we used to do a lot of good swaps with the local fishermen for stuff that we had left over. They can't put me in gaol for it now, can they?

26:30 No, they can't. We used to have the aircraft doing ROP [Reconnaissance Operations?] up there, the old Austers, still the old Austers and once you opened a drum of aviation fuel it had to be got rid of. If it was left overnight you couldn't use it in an aircraft because of maybe moisture content and I said to my boss "What am I going to do with this stuff?" And he said "Get rid of it" and he said "You'll think of a way."

27:00 And I said "How?" of course so I used to make up a brew and do a bit of trade with the local fishermen

and we ate very well thank you.

**And tell us during this time were you hearing about the lead up to Vietnam?**

Yeah, it was, the only part we heard of it at that time because bearing in mind that was the early Sixties that they'd sent the training

27:30 team people over there and that side of it was okay and we were interested like anybody else was. And the next thing I hear was that a mate of mine went to Army Aviation and he said "They're doing a flight up to go to Vietnam" and he said "They want reinforcements for it later on." That was in 1964 so I applied to go there and I eventually went to 16 Army Light Aircraft

28:00 in those days and I put in to go there and I got a transfer so I went there.

**Why did you want to transfer?**

Because I liked flying and I would have like a trip to Vietnam anyway, not that I needed war service. I had it anyway but that was okay so I got a trip up there and they put me in as sergeant, air field defence, which as pretty good job.

28:30 You used to go around, my job mainly was just checking the practise air strips that they had, training airstrips to make sure that, I had a mob of blokes that used to go and mow them and keep them generally clean and tidy, that sort of thing so the aircraft wouldn't crash when they landed on them. And on top of that I had previously done a trade training and testing officers course at Puckapunyal and nearly died from the cold and so that made

29:00 me qualified to test and train drivers to drive vehicles, and maintain them and supervise transport situations so while I was there, besides doing that job they put me into the transport office because they had a service corps sergeant there that wasn't qualified so I went in and did his job. So I was virtually doing two jobs and at one stage I was doing three but my job was

29:30 to check all fuel and stuff like that, issue TS4's for pilots going on trips down south. You make the TS4 out for them and whenever they bought fuel when they landed somewhere they submitted the TS4 and got the fuel and signed for it. As I said to our girl over there a TS4 is a very powerful piece of equipment. You could buy a Rolls Royce or a tank or a house or anything on that so there's a fair bit of trust on that job. And yeah, anyway,

30:00 I wasn't there very long and I said to the boss "How about a trip to Vietnam?" And he said "You're medically unfit" and I said "Yeah". And I said "Well if I can get through Canungra, the jungle training school, can I go to Vietnam?" And he said "If you can get through Canungra you can anywhere you like." I said "No, I want to go to Vietnam" and he said "Right, if you can get through it, you can go", so I went up and did it. It nearly killed me but I did it. In fact

30:30 I beat younger blokes at it than I was because I was pushing forty then and some eighteen, nineteen year old have got an arse like a pea where I had to keep kicking them up the backside to keep them going. Anyway that's another story and I got through that and back to...

**Well how had you been medically unfit exactly?**

I had asthmatic bronchitis and at that stage in time I didn't know it but I had PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] too

31:00 from Malaya, believe it or not. Anyway I went to Vietnam, I hope you're not listening to me Mr Veterans Affairs. I was on twenty percent when I went to Vietnam and they didn't know.

**How would they not know this?**

Well typical Government departments, not talking to each other and I wasn't going to tell them but I did get crook just before I came home anyway.

**And tell**

31:30 **us with the Army Aviation how does it work? How is that unit set up as different to the air force?**

Well ours is only light aircraft. We at that stage only had Cessna's and Sioux helicopters and that's all they had and they were only used as surveillance aircraft, courier work and stuff like that and that's all they are designed to do.

32:00 And that's what they were sent to do in Vietnam and the idea being of course in those light aircraft you can go up and you see troops on the ground and you use them in forward observation officers type of things to direct artillery onto targets and so they use them for that too. In fact that's one of the primary jobs of them, apart from the others I mentioned.

**And tell us in the**

32:30 **lead up to Vietnam did you have a strong opinion on what was happening there or the fight against communism?**

Yes, I did. I had an opinion that a lot of people weren't fully aware of and a lot of people still aren't fully aware of is the fact that Australia was a signatory to the South East Asian Treaty Organisation [SEATO]. Didn't know that did you?

**Yeah, I did.**

That was, people after the Second World War became

33:00 signatories to this in the South East Asian theatre that they would come to each other's aid in the case of war or whatever. Now a lot of people don't realise that is why we were there so we were vindicating our existence in relation to that agreement and another thing I get very annoyed about is when people say that national servicemen were forced to go to Vietnam. That is an absolute load of bullshit,

33:30 that never occurred. That was a Labor party ploy and nobody was allowed to put it in the papers to tell anybody either. I stood in front of a number of troops on many occasions when I did relieving work around the area and a unit was warned, and that was all units during the Vietnam War and if they had national servicemen in them and they were warned for service in Vietnam a parade was called and national servicemen were told that to no detriment to themselves if they didn't wish to accompany

34:00 that unit to Vietnam they could go to the orderly room and ask for a transfer elsewhere. And I never ever heard of a national serviceman asking for a transfer.

**And was this a free and fair kind of?**

Well of course it was because people were running around and the papers were spreading "Poor national servicemen forced to go to Vietnam" and they weren't.

**Why wasn't this disputed then?**

It wasn't in the papers,

34:30 nobody knew about it did they?

**I mean why didn't the army or someone else dispute this kind of, what was said in the papers?**

It wasn't said in the papers, there was no argument. Oh well why don't they say lots of things. Have a look at our intelligence situation at the moment, that is the greatest load of crap I've heard for years, all politics. But no, that's a fact. No national servicemen were forced to go to Vietnam.

35:00 See you imagine yourself as a young bloke in a unit with a mob of blokes you've served with for six or eight months and you're all working in together, they're all your mates and they're going to Vietnam, would you bug out? And that's what they relied on this happening, the good old Australian thing of not leaving your mates in the lurch and it worked.

**And why did you want to go yourself?**

Well I was a professional

35:30 soldier, it was my job and it was a very interesting job. It wasn't a case of gung ho, I want to go and kill a Red [communist] or anything like that. Why do professional soldiers volunteer for anything? It's your job and they obviously don't volunteer for everything but in a particular situation like that oh well, if you get knocked, you get knocked, what the hell?

36:00 You signed up for it, didn't you?

**And apart from the SEATO Treaty did you have an opinion about the communist threat?**

Yeah I did because my idea, and the same with the Malay thing, if it had of been let go, the communist threat in Asia if it hadn't of been stopped it could have quite perceivably come straight down through Malaya and that's why they

36:30 had to stop the communists there. And virtually much the same thing with Vietnam because they would have come straight down through Thailand, that's the way I thought and it was my own thoughts too. Nobody put that in my mind but just looking at the map you could see it.

**And so tell us about leaving for Vietnam? Was there any kind of going away ceremony or anything?**

37:00 No, no, I was put on a train up here with a lot of other blokes, we were sent to Sydney. That was funny that one, sent to Sydney and all the blokes, we went over as reinforcements to the first mob that went and we got to Sydney and we got to Rushcutter's Bay, the personnel depot, and we hopped on a bus and we went out to Kingsford Smith aerodrome, all lined up to get on the plane and they didn't have a ticket for me.

37:30 So everybody else went and I thought "oh" and I'm sitting here, no money, no nothing, so they gave me an advance on my pay book, which is an unheard of thing in the army and I went down to my cousins place who lived in Paddington in Sydney and I spent a week running around getting on the grog with all my old mates that I knew in Sydney and finally climbed on an aircraft and headed for Vietnam,



- 38:00 a Qantas aircraft and it wasn't going to Saigon, so they dropped me in Manila, me and a few other blokes, so we spent another five days in Manila having a ball. And I met an Australian businessman on the aircraft there and he asked me what was going on and nobody had ever seen one of those blue berets in those days and everybody, including the Yanks, was intrigued with that. And something comes up and he said "Aren't you going to have a drink?" And I said "No, I'm completely shot, I've got no money" and he said "Here" and he give me a couple of hundred dollars in
- 38:30 travellers cheques and "Thank you very much." I never even, I got his name but I lost it. I was going to send it to him but anyway I had a few dollars to spend when I was in Manila.
- What did you get up to there?**
- I am not telling you. And anyway Manila was a funny place. Everybody was walking around with a great parang hanging out of their belt. You know what a parang is? A great long knife
- 39:00 or a Colt 45 in their waistband and she was a wild joint, I'll tell you and if you went to a nightclub it had a sign inside the door "Please check your knives and other weapons at the desk before entering these premises." It's a wild place, I'll tell you. Anyway we finally jumped on another aeroplane, what was the name of it? An American airline anyway and a sick little girl,
- 39:30 after those few days there and lobbied in Saigon and by then I was used to the weather anyway because Manila wasn't much different and walked out and hopped on a Caribou and that took me down to Vung Tau and we were camped on the beach in those days.

## Tape 7

- 00:42 **Vung Tau, I was going to get you to tell me about the camp at Vung Tau?**
- Vung Tau, yeah, when I arrived at Vung Tau, a place called Back Beach and that's where the logistics support group is for the main force which
- 01:00 was at Nui Dat and all your supplies come up from there, through the main camp and motor vehicles, petroleum and all manner of ammunition and stuff like that. It all comes from there because the Jeparit comes in there and loads and it goes from there. And yeah, I run into a bloke there that I knew, had been at aviation with me, Jack Ellis and he says
- 01:30 "We'll go for a bit of a run into town" and I said "Give it a go, I've only been here five minutes." "No, come on, I'll take you in and show your around" so we go into Vung Tau, one of the few times that I went there and it's just a huge con joint, bar girls drinking whisky and Coke, which is cold tea and all this sort of stuff. And a lot of, believe it or not a lot of Pakistanis and Indians and Chinese who
- 02:00 run all the stores there, trying to sell their dog and all sorts of stuff. So we went in and he gives me a run around the town and oh the air force, the poor boys. They lived in Vung Tau too, in sub standard conditions the Minister for the Air Force said. They lived in an old French villa, fully air conditioned, all the noggies to make their beds, clean their boots and sweep the place out, all this sort of thing and he came out and
- 02:30 he said "The air force are living in the sub standard conditions" and I would have loved him to have gone up to Nui Dat and seen how we were living, in mud up to your eyebrows, but that's another story anyway, that.
- Well what did you do when you went into Vung Tau?**
- I was about to get to that. So anyway we went into this, two or three bars and just had a few drinks and by this time we were getting a little bit primed up and the product was pretty good and you couldn't get much to drink in the light of beer and stuff like that, mostly spirits in the
- 03:00 early days and you could get a beer called "Barmy Bar", which was Vietnamese and I reckoned that was embalming fluid. It was yuck but anyway we were drinking whisky and Coke or whatever, I forget but anyway probably rocket fuel, I don't know but anyway we went into this bar and Jack decided he was going to play up a bit so these two bar girls, they all come across and pat you on the legs and carry on, so we
- 03:30 jammed them into a corner and every time they got a whisky cocoa we'd chuck it out and filled it up with scotch and coke and with the inside of about an hour they were outside laughing at the ants. So the bloke that ran the place, because they try to prompt you all the time "What unit you from John?" "How many in your unit?" All this sort of stuff and anyway I was talking to a couple of Yanks and I said "Yes, this joint is a cesspit of espionage and they're trying to pick up everything that they can". So anyway this proprietor of the place he come
- 04:00 across because we got our girls drunk and started going crook on us and I don't know what happened or how it started but somebody turned a table over and the next minute the place was wrecked, so we got out of there in a hurry and got chased all over Vung Tau by the military police and the white mice as

they called the Vietnamese police. So Jack and I managed to get back to camp and it's all surrounded by barbed wire so we did leopard crawls under the barbed wire and it's a wonder we never got shot. Anyway

04:30 we got back and the product was good, we proved that anyway.

**What was the set up of the camp at Vung Tau like?**

I've got a lot of photographs of it there. It's usually behind barbed wire and had a few land mines and stuff around them and the gates are always guarded of course where you go in and out of the place but the camps were, in those days, all tented, sixteen by sixteen tents with

05:00 duckboards on the floor, timber, you could pick them up and take them away and sandbagged up to about that high, all the way around, which was very good of course if they mortar attacked or something like that. But the big trouble with it was it used to blow wind all the time there and of course the sandbags would get undermined and fall over so you spent half your life picking up all the sandbags again, which was a pain in the butt. But apart from that no, it was alright. I got a bit crook at one stage and I had to go to the, what was the

05:30 hospital in those days. It was about two tents about the size of this room with sandbags around it and that was the sum total of the hospital. It turned into a beautiful big steel huts and so forth later on with proper operating theatres and everything but as I say this was early days in Vietnam.

**What were your general impressions of what Vietnam was like?**

Well you never had much time to have a look around.

06:00 Most of my time was spent, in that stage in time you used to do shift work in the operations set up on the airstrip so what you used to do was travel from Back Beach into Vung Tau airstrip and do your turn there, also in sandbagged revetments and all that sort of thing. The radio was manned all the time. We only flew mainly daylight hours but sometimes they flew night time and

06:30 that was virtually my job was briefing pilots. We used to get the AACG [arrival airfield control group] codes as it came down from the Americans, Mac Five, and intelligence reports from our own blokes and

07:00 obviously the pilots that were going up I used to brief them and tell them where all these places were so they could have a look at them as they went around and that sort of caper. That was my job plus on the radio.

**You'd brief them on co-ordinates?**

Yeah, and they had their own map boards and they'd just mark them on.

**So what sort of area were you working in? Whereabouts were you located on the airport.**

On the Vung Tau airstrip itself. It was a big American air base.

07:30 **And what was the actual sort of building like that you were in?**

It was a tent with sandbags around it and there is a picture of it there somewhere and it's got a small bar that was pillaged from somewhere, probably a bar that got wrecked but it was in the camp anyway and we used to use that as a sort of a counter and all our radios were set in behind the back of that. And then we had a big map board out in front in

08:00 an area where the pilots could just sit and you used to just brief them on what was going on.

**So you'd talk to the pilots face to face?**

Oh yeah.

**And what were the kind of co-ordinates that you briefing them on?**

Oh mainly on suspected VC [Viet Cong] dugouts and could be dumps of rice or suspected areas, could be anything because the SAS were out there and they would sometimes radio in and tell of them of suspected areas that they couldn't get close to but would be looking

08:30 at and all that sort of thing and quite possibly you could see it from the air, that sort of thing. And in doing that of course they are flying around and looking themselves and if they see something they call the artillery up and say "there is some bad guys down here, drop a few shells on them and give them a headache."

**And how would the co-ordinates have come into you?**

From intelligence sources.

**How did they get them to you?**

Usually on a printout

09:00 that came in on another aircraft, that sort of thing. The other thing we used to do, I was responsible for

issuing code books. The pilots used to carry code books which enabled them to talk to virtually any units in the area but the codes only lasted twenty four hours so you had to reissue every twenty four hours. So it was made up in a small booklet, like two aluminium covers, and you just put that in to them.

- 09:30 And immediately if a pilot was shot down or he dropped his code book out the door all code books were cancelled from then on, straight away and you'd issue a complete new lot. They used to come down from Mac Five, which was the American headquarters in Saigon, so that enabled them to virtually fly anywhere in Vietnam and talk to somebody. If they were in that particular area they could come up on the right frequency and or whatever the code was to contact that frequency.

**And what was the security around the**

- 10:00 **printouts that you would get with the co-ordinates?**

Well they always came in an aircraft, so we had a situation once where an aircraft was coming in and the bag that they were in or something the catch flew open on it and the whole lot flew out the door and naturally enough you couldn't get down on the ground and try and pick it all up so immediately the whole lot was cancelled, straight away. So they bring a new

- 10:30 lot up and they had to go back to Saigon and pick them up and bring them through to us, so it was very secure. There was one particular chopper [helicopter] that went down and he couldn't [get] his book out and it was pretty badly knocked about so they just put the gun ships on it and blew it to pieces, just to save the codes because it saves a lot of time if you can do that.

**And what would you do after you brief the pilots?**

Do a radio watch,

- 11:00 listen to them and they, oh they'd radio in. Mainly in that particular area they only radioed in when they were leaving or coming back sort of thing and get a clearance and they'd get a clearance from the main Vung Tau tower as well.

**Would you ever communicate with them on the radio?**

Not unless you really had to but it was possible yeah, but we very rarely ever had to, not in Vung Tau,

- 11:30 but Nui Dat was a different kettle of fish [different situation]. You could talk to them all the time there and you had to.

**And how long did you spend at Vung Tau?**

Oh probably six or eight weeks, that's all and then we went up, see the main elements of the task force moved down from Binh Hui and they proceeded to build a camp at Nui Dat, well I moved up just as that started.

- 12:00 **At Vung Tau what was the general set up of the air traffic control that the Americans were using?**

They had a full operational tower and they can land anything there.

**How big?**

It's a big airstrip, huge place, but it was probably about, from the main township of Vung Tau itself it was probably about two or three miles away, further in. I could show you from air shots I've got there where it is

- 12:30 but no, it was quite a fare. They got mortared once that I know of and it never hit anything.

**How busy was it?**

Very busy, very busy and they had all sorts, from fighters to surveillance aircraft, to Chinooks, Chinook gun ships, you name it they had it there and it was also, it was also the graveyard,

- 13:00 for want of a better word where damaged aircraft were brought in. If an aircraft was down they'd pick them up with a Chinook and bring them in and put them down, that sort of thing. They had a big paddock full of them there.

**Was it only American aircraft that were landing there?**

And our own, Australian Army Aviation and the air force, 35 Squadron was there, the Caribous, the Wallaby aircraft they

- 13:30 call them.

**Just to clear up for me the sort of difference between the army aviation and the air force, what was the differentiation?**

Well the air force work in conjunction with the army on certain aspects of flying. Army aircraft worked directly and are controlled directly by the army and nobody else and it's got to be that way because if there is a situation

- 14:00 where troops get into trouble or something like that the task force commander or the army aviation bloke involved as got to be able to do something straight away. In early days when we first went to Vietnam we had the RAAF 9 Squadron there, which were the choppers and the RAAF used to run a system whereby the army could use their choppers provided we didn't bend them or get a bullet in them.
- 14:30 It was a, because the air force consider that they should be the only [ones] that fly anything and it was a very hard situation to try and get them to change so what used to happen was that Brigadier Jackson and I was privy to a lot of the information because I worked right alongside him and inside the area where he worked he had to virtually get on his bended knees to get an RAAF chopper to do a lot of work for us.
- 15:00 It wasn't the chopper pilots themselves, it was the hierarchy and ultimately, I am talking from hearsay, eventually Brigadier Jackson told them where to shove their aircraft and we'd used American ones, and we did for quite some time. And the 9 Squadron blokes were upset about that because they wanted to be in the thick of it and they ultimately were on the Battle of Long Tan too but initially the aircraft said "Yes, you can use our choppers as long as you don't
- 15:30 bend them." How crazy, so the outcome of that, because later on down the track was that all their Hughie helicopters were turned over to the army, Chinooks are over to the army now, and the air force, don't get me wrong, have still got choppers but they don't use them in the same situation as we do, Black Hawks, do all army. Everything is controlled by army now, which makes sense because if you are going to work
- 16:00 army people with army aircraft, with air force, you've got to go through, for want of a better word, the bureaucracy, "You can't use our aircraft, you'll bend them" and stuff like this. We had a situation when Luscombe Field first opened in Nui Dat whereby the Americans came in and had a look at it and they were happy with it, it was a pretty rugged sort of a strip, but the Australians came in and said "No, we can't land our Hercules there because it
- 16:30 is too short" and that's even with an empty aircraft and I've got a photograph I can show you there where the Americans landed one fully loaded, with vehicles and all. They only stopped about from here to my front fence from the end of the strip but they stopped and unloaded it, so that gives you the idea, so the Australians wouldn't use the strip unless it was lengthened another quarter of a mile, which they did.
- 17:00 **And you mentioned some of the main things from Vung Tau but what was the general, I guess the purpose of where the Australian Army Aviation?**
- Well we were initially in Binh Hui and when the Nui Dat thing started there was no real area where we could put aircraft because there was no strip there or anything. You could land helicopters in certain areas but
- 17:30 they operated for want of that reason out of Vung Tau until such time as they started to get an area clear where the aircraft could land and take off and that was the reason for that. Luscombe Field by the way, a lot of people don't know the meaning of the name, it was named after a Captain Luscombe that was killed in Korea. He was flying an Aero P aircraft and he crashed into the
- 18:00 river and he was an army fellow and that's how Luscombe Field got its name.
- What was the American effort at Vung Tau called?**
- Vung Tau, I suppose. I don't know. I didn't know any other name for it but I suppose it had one with the Yanks but we never worried about it.
- What did you think of the way the Yanks ran the airfield?**
- Alright, they are very professional, they are very professional. I am not terribly happy about the way they run their aircraft though. They use them like dump trucks,
- 18:30 jeeps and whatever. Well when we were at Nui Dat a lot of the American FAC [forward air control] pilots and some of the courier ones that used to land in there got to know about our workshop and they used to call in and ask our blokes to fix their aircraft for them. Well this mate of mine who lives in Texas now, Jack Ellis, he was telling me there was a bloke come in here one day and he was flying an FAC and he said "I reckon there was four dead plugs in it". Spark plugs and he replaced it, retuned it
- 19:00 and he said it was like a new aeroplane and you would say it would be too. Oh they are terrible, they used to have oil pouring out of them everywhere, oh dear. The Thai Air Force was the worst. I got in one of those once and I did an illegal trip up north and the Australian aircraft I went up in went down and couldn't get back so I got a trip back in a baby Herc, a 123, and the Thai Air Force, oh you want to see the thing, it was fit for the junk heap
- 19:30 but I had to get back or I would have got caught. And I got in this thing and they started one fan and five minutes later they managed to get the other one going and the oil was pouring out of it everywhere and I thought "oh", so we're going along and you're sitting there and you say "There is something wrong here." There was two or three other people on it with me and a filthy bloody thing it was and the

pilots hadn't had a shave for a month and I thought they were both mechanics or something and anyway you go "There is something wrong with this aircraft

20:00 apart from the fact that it a heap of junk" and I was looking around and the rivets were going round and round in the fuselage and that didn't do much for your peace of mind I can tell you. Anyway we got back to Saigon and I got on an Australian aircraft and got back home without anybody finding out I was gone. I did that a few times on the gun ships too.

20:30 **Where had you been when you came back with the Thai baby Herc?**

Up north, up to Da Nang.

**Why?**

To have a look around. I got the chance. The Yanks would fly you anywhere but this was an Australian aircraft, 35 Squadron anyway that I went up on.

**How did you get along with the Yanks, on a personal level?**

Good, good, get anything for a pair

21:00 of boots off the Yanks. Their boots were terrible. Only thing I couldn't get was the 38 pistols they had there. The air force pilots had a special pistol and I couldn't get one of those. I got a 45 out of them.

**Was there anything particular that they wanted that was Australian?**

Yeah, they liked our bush hats and I can

21:30 always remember there was an element of 9 Division landed there at one stage and a lot of them came up into Nui Dat and the majority of them were all Negroes. They were American Regular Army, damn good troops too, really good blokes and a lot them were white men of course and they were only there a matter of hours and they all, because we always used to wander around in a pair of shorts and no shirt most of the time and here is all these white Yanks and black Yanks running around in Australian shorts

22:00 and bush hats. They reckoned it was good fun because they were always made to wear with their shirt sleeves down.

**How did you notice that the black and white Americans got on?**

Good, I used to write to one bloke in America for years. No, they were good blokes.

**Was there anything?**

I am talking about regular army troops and I am talking about early days in Vietnam. After that you've heard what history has said about them, drugs, radio up to the

22:30 ear on patrols.

**How did the white Americans treat the black Americans?**

Never got involved in that.

**What did you observe?**

I observed they were okay. I never saw any trouble with them. I went into one of their dining halls in Vung Tau on one of the very rare trips I went down there and I was just sitting around and all having a feed or whatever. Service life

23:00 is different to what it is outside, like anywhere else I think you'll find.

**In what way?**

Well everybody is treated as an equal. See the American Army has changed to what it used to be. Some of their highly commissioned people, officers, are Negroes now days, not like in the old days, smart men amongst them too.

**When you were at the Vung Tau**

23:30 **air base were you sort of on American rations or?**

Yeah, yeah, we were. We used to have, especially one that I hated was a thing called Pork Links and they were like a little pork sausage about probably that long and ninety nine percent fat and the longer you cooked them the small they got. Etherised eggs,

24:00 yeah, you'd have an egg on your plate and you'd cut it and the ether goes up passed your noses and their potatoes you'd have on your plates and do you remember what Lux Flakes looked like? Do you remember? Did you ever see those? You are showing your age. Lux Flakes were like a little diamond shaped thing, very soft, people used to wash their stockings and stuff like that in them and that was their potatoes, that's what you

24:30 used to get. I got sick and tired of turkey and ham. When I first got there I thought it was beautiful but seven days a week got a bit rough and most of our rations were American. Would you believe we used to get rabbits from India and potatoes?

**Were they good?**

Yeah. Yeah, they were alright, different.

25:00 **So working on the American base would you still be camped with the Australians?**

Yeah, yeah, see we, Back Beach was the complete Australian base. It was a resupply area actually, the main supply area for Nui Dat itself and we didn't have Americans in there at all. Oh, no, no, we didn't have any, no.

25:30 We didn't have any Americans actually working with us until we went to Nui Dat and we had a couple of American Air Force blokes with us there but that was all.

**Well what sort of interaction did you have with the Americans at Vung Tau?**

Not a terrible lot. The FAC unit was next door to us and another mob that flew Otters were alongside of us. Otters were a single engine, like a big flying dump truck.

26:00 They are really too, they are shocking looking things but they are a very hardy aircraft. They are a Canadian aircraft and we had one of those crash later on down the track.

**What happened?**

Well that was when we were up in Nui Dat. He was a bloke coming in from up north somewhere and he had an engine failure and he dropped into

26:30 an abandoned, well virtually an abandoned strip, which was about six or eight miles up from the Task Force Headquarters and was yelling "help" because he knew it was all in bad guys country so we had to get some support up there and get people around his aircraft so that the bad guys didn't burn it on him or something. They got it going the next morning anyway.

**When you first arrived at Vung Tau who briefed you on what your role would be?**

I don't remember to be

27:00 quite truthful. No, there was one bloke there, that was all. We virtually did it off the cuff.

**Was there any kind of explanation of what...**

Well we basically knew what we had to do. There was one captain there that I knew pretty well and he knew me from artillery days. He was an ex artillery man and he basically told me what had to be done

27:30 and so we just set it up and we just played it by, off the cuff and it got us working, Australian ingenuity, the mother of invention and necessity.

**Were there any sorts of kinks that you had to iron out, or slip ups to begin with?**

Oh not to any great extent because it was very flexible for want of a better word. Because mainly when they took off from our particular area on

28:00 the airstrip at Vung Tau and they just told us they were going, everything was okay, and then they'd switch frequencies and go onto the tower at Vung Tau and control would be from there and so they normally worked from between Binh Hui and Vung Tau.

**Were there any local Vietnamese working on the air force base?**

With the Americans, yeah,

28:30 but you'd never find any on the Australian bases.

**Why not?**

Wouldn't trust them for a damn good reason. We had one, I've got a photograph of a girl that was working when we were down at Back Beach, Vung Tau, and they had screened her and they did everything and they reckoned that she was alright and she turned out to be a Viet Cong spy. That was the only one

29:00 I ever saw. She used to do just mess duties in the sergeants' mess, wash the dishes and things like that but no, no, whenever, especially in Nui Dat if they bought prisoners in they bought them in in a closed in vehicle and when they took them out they had blindfolds on and when they went to the intelligence for the interrogation it was a blindfold on when they went in, a blindfold off while they were in there and sometimes they didn't even do that and blindfolded and they never saw anything of the base.

29:30 The Yanks in my opinion were very lax about that and I reckon that's half their trouble in Iraq too, just between you and the gatepost. We used to clear up to half a mile all around on any defensive position we ever had and you could go into an American base and the jungle would be growing up over the

barbed wire and from here to the other side of the road. That is a real recipe for disaster and there would be noggies running

30:00 out the gate all day and you didn't know who the hell they were so the Yanks were pretty slack.

**What was your opinion sort of when you first arrived of the situation that the Vietnamese were in?**

In relation to what?

**Oh I guess just the Vietnamese that were living in Vung Tau?**

Oh I never interacted with them, wasn't interested in them. No, waste of time asking them anyway because every time you asked or wanted something off them they had their hand out for money.

30:30 But that is the situation, that has been the same for a hundred years in Vietnam and it's a dog eat dog existence and always has been, right since the Chinese first went into the place if you'd like to read your history up. They will sell anything, their mother, their father, their kids, they don't care. I'm talking about city dwellers. The country dwellers are completely different. They are a good family

31:00 group usually. We had a situation where they had a contact there at one stage in very early days and they bought the couple of blokes that they'd bowled over and some idiot buried them in the garbage dump and the padre got to hear of it and had to go and dig them up and take them down and put them in the Vietnamese cemetery, so they are very family orientated where that sort of thing is concerned.

31:30 **And how did they transport you from Vung Tau to Nui Dat when you moved down there?**

I flew up.

**In?**

That was in a Cessna I think, yeah. Had our gear come up by road. I was reasonably well set up because I got on well with the Yanks down there. I had a hospital bed with, I used to use a parachute for sheets and I had a proper pillow.

32:00 **Is this at Nui Dat?**

I had it at Vung Tau and I took it to Nui Dat with me, yeah. I don't know of anyone else that had one quite frankly. I got it from, it was the 153rd Evacuation Hospital. I knew a bloke down there.

**Had you given him anything for it?**

No, I don't think so. He didn't want anything for it, no. It had a mattress and everything. Most of our blokes were sleeping on those canvas stretchers which

32:30 would collapse half the time and a very well built piece of Australian equipment.

**And what was the general layout of Nui Dat?**

It was set out like a big army base. You had roads right through it. You came in through a village called Da Long and that was where D445 used to hang about.

33:00 The blokes that were civilians by daylight and they were soldiers at night and come in and have a shoot at you, stuff like that. But you come in through there and there was the American artillery on the left hand side and down further was the Australian artillery. It was a road going through and then down a bit further was the armoured corps and the RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical & Mechanical Engineers] blokes on the right hand side, that's the engineers. Over on the right was the New Zealand artillery. The first road where you turned right was Task Force Headquarters and

33:30 the road continued on round through the back and the Australian engineers were over there and then it went a fair way round behind the back of Nui Dat hill. Nui Dat hill was like a pimple in the middle of the camp and the SAS were up on top of that and they had fifty calibre machineguns poking out towards the Nui Ni Hills because it was a big open stretch there because the engineers went through with ball and chain and bulldozers and flattened it all out so you could see a long way.

34:00 And you got around a bit further and they eventually put a post office up and then they had 6 Battalion and 2 Battalion I think it was and 161 Reccy Flight and my unit in the corner of the airstrip and oh the infantry battalions. The battalions were up along the northern side of the Nui Dat strip and it was completely open down the Nui Dat strip to the, well it was Route One actually.

34:30 It used to go up to Binh Hui and Saigon from Vung Tau and that's very rough but a lot of it changed after that. I've seen maps that were done, I've got maps in the shed actually, that were done after later than when I was there and the place is a hell of a lot different. In latter days just before it finished they had swimming pools and all sorts of things up there. We had nothing like that.

35:00 **And describe the set up of your tent for me?**

The set up of my tent? Well there was two of us in my tent. We had one of these, well it was not exactly a tent, it was a frame type thing and we had my bed that end and his bed up that end. The floors initially

were made from empty cartridge cases from the artillery guns, like a big cartridge case, a big round thing, and you used to put them, hammer

- 35:30 them into the ground and the floors were made of ammunition cases, wooden ammunition cases, just to keep you off the ground initially and then they were sandbagged all around. So your tents were up high and the fly, you know the fly over the top of your tent? It was always up higher than the sides so that plenty of air would go through.

**What was it like to sleep in?**

Hot, no fans.

- 36:00 And we had a, where my boys were we had a bunker that we built ourselves, for air cover and that sort of thing, from mortar shells and stuff like that and just out from the side of it we had a pit with some purloined weapons that I managed to get from my American friends and that was basically it.

**And coming into Nui Dat after Long Tan, what did you hear**

- 36:30 **about what had happened to them?**

After Long Tan? I was there only very shortly after it and I knew a lot of the blokes that were in that. Not much really. Only one thing about it was one of my mates gave me a Chi-gong rifle that had been captured and I used that for a bit of trade. I was going to bring it home but I thought got a N1 Carbine instead which was very handy to use in a chopper because it is only small.

- 37:00 **I guess was there any talk about what had happened?**

Not really, no. I went over and saw all the blokes when I got there because it happened just before I got there and I knew a lot of the blokes in 6th Battalion. I went over and had a few beers with them. I think I only went over there twice, that was all but see they were mainly out on ops the vast majority of time.

- 37:30 **How many men did you have sort of under you?**

Six. I had a little kingdom.

**How did you sort of?**

We used to just take turns on doing shift work because the radio had to be on air twenty four hours a day.

**And as a group how cohesive were you?**

- 38:00 Well they were in a tent alongside mine. They were all, two corporals and the rest were private soldiers, all national servicemen.

**How close were you?**

Oh as close as you normally get in those sort of situations. Sometimes you didn't see each other for a couple of days because of the shift work but I had a field telephone in my tent all the time so that if anything happened they'd just ring up and...

- 38:30 No, that was pretty demanding because you were sort of on call twenty four hours a day.

**How were the shifts structured?**

We used to have two blokes on all the time and one bloke would sleep and the other one would work and they used to just do it amongst themselves.

- 39:00 And then towards the finish we cut it down. We only had one on but he didn't have to stay awake because we had an alert button and if anything went off he'd just wake up. In the area which was next door to us, which was called Ardi Attack and there was somebody there twenty four hours a day anyway. So basically after the radio did go because at night there is very little traffic on the radio except we were always on the same radio net as

- 39:30 the infantry and they used to do a lot of covert operations at night and sneak around and you'd hear them whispering to each other on the radio, you could just hear them.

## Tape 8

- 00:35 **What was the title of the actual task?**

Kangaroo Control.

**And what was the work you were actually doing?**

The work there entailed keeping aeroplanes from getting mixed up with artillery. If you can understand



artillery is firing and aircraft are coming in from over there and you don't want him to start flying into a big shell, it could knock him out of the sky. So all aircraft used to call us coming into our air space

01:00 and all artillery that was being fired was given to us and we used to plot it on the board so he would tell us where he was and we would give him wherever possible a safe passage through artillery without getting blown out of the sky.

**And where had you learnt the skills for this work?**

Learnt it on the job. At the particular time when we went to Vietnam no-one had ever done it before.

01:30 **So is that what you started with when you went to Vietnam? Like was that the role that you went there to do?**

No, it wasn't the role I was supposed to be doing. I was supposed to be doing, as I mentioned much earlier in the situation I was supposed to be doing sergeant air field defence but that sort of didn't exist because we were right inside the perimeter virtually and what defence our particular went, we had a fifty calibre machinegun right on the front of

02:00 gate and a couple of M60's facing down the strip and behind us was the infantry and over there was the engineers so it would be very unlikely that anyone would have a go at us so my job virtually became redundant so they put me on that one.

**Did you do any of this air field defence at all?**

No, didn't have to because as I say we had all these people around us and why would you bother?

**So what was the process of transferring you into this new role with planes? What did they do?**

02:30 The boss said "You're pretty intelligent, go up there, hands on and learn it like everybody else is going to have to do" because there was no such thing in the Australian Army at that stage in time. It had never been done before.

**What was the exact title they give to that job?**

Oh artillery warning actually, aircraft artillery warning liaison type thing.

03:00 The Americans had been doing it for years but we'd never been in a situation with army aviation where we were involved in anything like that so we went over and we just had to do it off the pat and the bloke that originally went there with me, Col Campbell, he's dead now, he had done air traffic control as such but myself I hadn't had anything whatever to do with it so I just had to learn it on the job from scratch.

03:30 In other words, the hard way. And I learnt quite a fair bit off him. We, for want of a better word, had an administrative hiccup and he was actually should have been sent home but he was sent to the tower in Vung Tau to work with the Yanks and I got landed with the lot.

**Why? What had happened?**

04:00 Protection of our other people, I don't think I'll go into that.

**Fair enough, fair enough.**

No, there was an administrative hiccup where he performed rather badly, I'll put it that way and he was moved on. He really should have been sent home. In other words he cracked up but it was a bit worse than that.

**What made him crack up?**

Pressure.

04:30 **Was there anyone to brief you or to teach you what to do with the job?**

No.

**How do you teach yourself then?**

Trial and error like anything else I guess. See he had the basic air traffic control experience which we used. The only difference with it was that we had to work out our own method of plotting which when you think about it it wasn't that hard

05:00 because all you had to do was find out where an aircraft was coming from once it entered into your airspace and once he told you where he was and you knew where the artillery was firing from so in theory you could guide him through it. But we always gave him a grid reference and not magnetic so that he could work straight off his map and forget about a compass. And we always ended the transmission with "You should be clear of artillery", not "you will."

**What I was interested to know**

05:30 **about since you're learning this job how did you learn the communication kind of ways to**

**talk?**

Well everybody is conversant with radio work mainly, especially the senior NCO's and you're used to using the radio and so normal radio procedure applied except that aviation radio procedure is

06:00 pretty slack in my opinion. There is no "overs and outs" half the time but you got used to that.

**There were certain words you had to learn to use or?**

Not really. No, just a basic radio communication, "over and out", grid references and you just used the normal radio procedure.

**Were there any people in a similar kind of role from the air force to what you were working in there?**

No,

06:30 we had the FAC people alongside us. They were the air raid people, the Americans, but they worked through us anyway, they were on the same radio net as us and 9 Squadron they used us as well, the air force. They didn't have an air force facility as such, no.

**And so were you working physically**

07:00 **next to these Americans or?**

Yeah the FAC Americans, there was about six or eight of them right next door to us and then 9 Squadron, when they decided to be good boys and come on our side they were working alongside of us as well.

**Describe the set up kind of thing?**

Well just a set of radios. They had their own maps up, the same as we did and for the main part they used to do the same plots as we did but we gave the information out and that included all aircraft that entered our airspace.

07:30 **So take us through like a typical shift for example?**

Well you would normally have an aircraft and he would come up and say "Kangaroo Patrol, this is Rattler Five, I am entering your airspace. I am proceeding from grid reference on a magnetic bearing of" whatever "and how am I for arti?" That is about all they'd ever say to you so you'd plot him on your

08:00 board and you'd say right, he's heading in x direction and you'd have a look at where the artillery is going and so you give him a grid reference from where he is to a point there and he does a righty there and a grid reference to there sort of thing. Or sometimes you might say "it's all clear, come straight through." It's pretty simple really.

**And did all planes and all artillery have to communicate to you at all times?**

Supposed to. Sometimes they didn't.

08:30 The ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] regiments were pretty slack. You'd be saying to a pilot "Well there's no artillery in your area" and he'd say "God damn man, what's that that just went past me?" And you'd say "Where did it come from?" And he'd say "I've got no idea but it was bloody close" and as far as we knew there was no artillery there so the ARVN used to fire quite often and not tell us.

**How did you co-ordinate the different nationalities, the Americans, the Australians, the army?**

09:00 Well most of it come through arti-tac. There is a tactical situation in Task Force Headquarters that works through all artillery and you had the Kiwis and you had the Americans and the Australian artillery and whenever they fired guns of any sort or they fired a task on their guns they informed arti-tac, who in turn told us. And the Yanks did the same. Those ones were all very good but occasionally see they had not far from us at Swan Moth they had an artillery battery,

09:30 a regiment actually of ARVN and I think down towards Baria they had another one and occasionally they'd just let fly and tell nobody and that got a bit interesting sometimes but nobody got hit.

**Did they have to hold their fire until they got the okay from you or?**

No, no, they just told you where they were firing. Normally they,

10:00 the artillery was controlled through arti-tac, from the regiment to arti-tac and normally the fire commands or the area to be fired on came from arti-tac anyway and anyone outside our area, such as the ARVN and the Yanks if they were there, which was very rare because we had a battery there anyway, which worked through us and there was no hassle really.

**And what kind of area were you**

10:30 **covering?**

Oh in actual physical depth I couldn't tell you. I used to know all that once but I forget now. It was a

fairly large area, virtually the whole of Phuoc Tuy Province, just to give it an actual acreage I don't know.

**But roughly you were covering all of Phuoc Tuy?**

Yeah, yeah. If anything outside the Phuoc Tuy Province, north of where

11:00 we were was 173rd Airborne so if we did hear of something or an aircraft was in that area and he was closer to them he'd get them to fly from the American batteries in the Binh Hui area. It's all an overlap.

**I was interested to know, would you communicate with?**

Binh Hui? No.

11:30 **You wouldn't communicate with any in similar roles to you in different?**

No, we didn't have radios powerful enough for that anyway. The Yanks had a lot of stuff like that. When we first went to Vietnam to be quite frank about it the equipment was absolutely bloody disgusting. We were using radios out of armoured personnel vehicles to communicate to the air and our UHF [Ultra High Frequency] radios were little man pack things like

12:00 this and half the time we did what they call a moonlight flight over and they used very fly very high and they used to do a heat sensor onto the ground and they couldn't talk to us. I had an air force technician up there at one stage of the game and there was an old tower, the French were in there at one stage, and what it was used for I don't know but he said "Well we'll see if we can get the UHF to work" so we took the mountain to

12:30 Mohammed or whatever and we used to put one of these little UHF sets up on top of this tower. It was a pretty hairy sort of a climb and then we motored down so that we could talk to them but you couldn't talk to them a terrible lot, only when they were right over us and then you could talk. But they only lasted probably a fortnight, ten days and then poof, they blew up because they weren't designed to do that sort of thing. But we had a lot of troubles like that, with radios, generators. We had

13:00 old generators that were made in 1942 and over in our unit they had five of them to keep two going. Used to butcher them to keep two going and our uniforms were all Second World War stuff.

**What would you do when there was equipment failures?**

Go and bludge off the Yanks and if a radio blew up I used to take it over to our sigs and get them to fix it, if they could. That was for about the first twelve months we were there. It improved later they tell

13:30 me but you just had to make do with what you had.

**What kind of equipment exactly was it? What was the names of these radios?**

Oh off the top of my heads I can't remember the name of them. It was thirty six years ago mate.

**Oh fair enough. We talk to some vets which are real tech heads.**

Oh no, no my brain isn't that good.

**And would there be any chance of, I know this is a**

14:00 **no, but any kind of conversation or chatter with any of the aircraft pilots?**

Oh quite often. The Yanks used to try and get pretty chatty but depending on how busy the airwaves were as to whether you'd talk much to them.

14:30 **Tell us about a typical shift. We started on that but tell us what time the shift would start and?**

A shift would usually change over at six o'clock in the morning and a normal shift would be just normal traffic to aircraft, warn them of artillery or anything else that might be of interest to them. A lot of times we had trouble with communications because up at a

15:00 place called Swan Mock or in that area the VC had a radio jamming equipment and they used to play all these Chinese songs and you'd press the button and as soon as you did that they'd blare you out with all this stuff. This happened a couple of times in a couple of different areas. We used the radios one night and the

15:30 Americans came over and pinpointed where this was and the next night they said "Just work as normal but be prepared for a bang" and anyway they came over the next night and we started to talk and they came in with all their crap and the next minute the B52's let them have it. No more spam, to use a modern word, so that fixed them up.

**How did they get the spam onto your radio?**

Radio

16:00 jamming.

**How does that work?**

Well usually a very powerful radio that will override what you're doing, oldest trick in the book. They used to do it all the time in the Second World War.

**And when would a shift end?**

Six to six, six at night till six in the morning and then you'd have a couple of blokes on, that's all.

**How tough was this on you?**

It depends. Occasionally if you'd get a bit of a rumble on the wire or something

16:30 like that, they think somebody is creeping on the wire well you had to stay on duty and listen out there in case we had to send an aircraft up but apart from that mostly it was pretty good. The other set ups of course is when the slick, a slick is, or slicks is for want of a better word is a flight or a squadron of choppers, Hughies, coming into Vung Tau strip.

17:00 I used to go down and sit on the strip on the bonnet of a Land Rover with radios in it and you'd put one lot in orbit out there and another one would come in and pick up the number of troops that were going for an insurgent or an operation, whatever and as soon as they took off you'd bring the other ones back in and land them and that would be a rotation job, depending on how many people went out. Because at the time we had an air traffic control tower built on the side of Nui Dat Hill but we didn't have any equipment to put in it so we just had to sit down there on a Land Rover

17:30 with a radio and talk to them that way with a pair of goggles on it and get smothered in dust from chopper blades.

**What did you think of doing it this way?**

Well you didn't have any choice, did you? Yeah, no choice.

**Was it a bit of a worry for you being in these conditions?**

Not really because once the choppers go off the dust clears pretty quick. They had a situation when they first put the

18:00 strip in our engineers were doing much the same stuff, very inadequate equipment, little teaspoon tippers and stuff and scrapers that came out of the Ark [very old] and I will always remember there was an American engineer unit came down the place, all these big Negroes with cigars sticking out their mouths and you've seen them in the movies, huge, bloody equipment. And they pulled up down the bottom of the strip, they were only going that far for the day and this Yank major came up and he was

18:30 watching our blokes scratching away trying to make Nui Dat field and he said "God damn it man, move over, we'll fix this up for you" and they did in about two hours what our blokes did in three weeks, with this equipment. Then anyway they virtually finished it off for them. It was pretty good, this was early days. They extended it later as I said but they came in and they bitumened

19:00 it and they had to put sand on it and that got to be a bit of a problem but they fixed that up by getting two choppers side by side and just going up and down the strip and blew all the sand off, aerial sweeping.

**Well how did you, now you're talking about the Americans and all their equipment, what did you think of the difference in this capacity between the Americans and Australians?**

You'd just look and say "We're pretty pathetic."

19:30 A lot of our equipment in later days, just coming towards the end of my term there we were getting a lot of good equipment. Their ration packs were terrible. They loved our stuff. Our boots were much superior to theirs and a lot of our mechanical equipment, armour and stuff like that was quite a bit better. Not that we had much armour. We only had APC's [armoured personnel carriers] there at the time. The tanks came in later, after I left. There were no tanks

20:00 there before then but oh no, the Yanks were okay.

**And tell us about your set up? What was the building like that you worked in with Kangaroo Force?**

Initially we worked in a tent and then they built one of these Lysaught huts, a big galvanised thing and we had a room about as big as this with all our radio gear set up. It's all there on those slides there actually. With our maps

20:30 and everything on it and a bank of batteries over here and back up radios, we always had a double set of radios going. If one stopped, just immediately switch the other one on, when we had another one and that was basically it and along side of it we had a container which was fully sandbagged with a big antenna going up with back up gear in there which we used to just switch on every twenty four hours and make sure it worked.

**And**

21:00 **what kind of frequency would you be setting the radios at?**

Usually Fox Mike and that was all.

**Did it change?**

How do you mean? No, you were on the same sort of radio, type radio, but the frequency changed, oh yeah.

**How often would the frequencies change?**

Every twenty four hours.

21:30 And our normal working frequency on artillery, that stayed the same, all the time but the other frequency which was controlled over on the other side of Luscombe Field, where the aircraft were based in those days, was the same as I mentioned earlier, they had a twenty four hour change over all the time. They were carried on the aircraft.

**Why would the artillery frequencies stay the same?**

Well if you think about it by the time

22:00 anybody was listening to what you were saying, it was too late, you'd hit them anyway. So the only thing they could do with your artillery frequency as I said earlier on is jam you and that's what they were trying to do. It didn't work though, we fixed them up.

**And we were talking about these twelve hour shifts, how busy could they get at times?**

22:30 Oh most times not very busy because see through the day you always had two, sometimes three people on and they got plenty of rest, there was no problem. I used to just work in a supervisory capacity and if someone wanted to go for something to eat or go to the toilet or something like that I'd stand in for him. If I wasn't there I'd be down in my tent and they could ring me up. If I wasn't there they could call me on my radio in the Land Rover anyway so it was no hassles, but it was my direct

23:00 responsibility yeah of course.

**Was there a bit of stress in this job?**

As I said you were on deck twenty four hours a day and I had no leave while I was there because this other bloke was down in Vung Tau.

**So you never had any leave?**

No leave in twelve months, no.

**Did that get to you or annoy you?**

It did in the finish because I was like that.

23:30 **Why didn't they try to arrange something for you to give you that rest?**

Well I could go into that but I am not going to. People covering their arse, to coin an Americanism. We had a bloke there who was supposed to be doing air traffic control. In fact he was an ex-RAAF bloke who flew on Lancasters during

24:00 the war and how he ever got back in I'll never know. But he came back in the army after the war and went to Korea and had a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] actually and somebody liked him and they put him in to come over to Vietnam with us and he was too old. He should never have gone in the job anyway but that was another one see. So I was virtually, in one respect trying to do two peoples work because he was part of the setup.

24:30 But he had a good job over at the airstrip because he virtually ran it by himself because they only ran it from first light in the morning until half past five, six o'clock at night and that's all his job was, just briefing pilots basically and doing code books, a nice easy job. He spent most of his life

25:00 on the turps.

**And what was your level of responsibility like?**

I was responsible for the whole lot of it.

**So could you relax on your time off?**

Not really, you had to be on deck all the time but as I said I used to zoom off and do an illegal flight here and there and stuff like that but I picked my times.

**What's a good time to do that?**

Oh you could usually figure it out but I had a pretty good corporal working with me.

**What would have happened if you had of got caught on one of these?**

Clang, "watch your fingers sonny".

25:30 **Did you have any close calls or interesting events on one of these flights?**

Oh yeah, but I don't want to go into it.

**Why not?**

You always get a fright. All I'll say about is the difference between their tracer rounds and ours is that ours are red and theirs are green and when [you] see green ones coming up from the ground at you you start

26:00 wondering where it's going to finish up.

**So how do you get in a situation where the green ones are coming up at you?**

Cause they don't like you.

**But that's your side isn't it?**

No, green ones are theirs.

**Oh green ones are theirs, okay. Sorry, I've mixed the two up.**

No, I did a few illegal trips with the Americans on gun ships and got tangled up in a couple of fairly hairy ones.

26:30 **Did it make you think twice about going up?**

No, I went up again.

**Why did you go up again if you had a close call?**

Why do you do these things?

**I don't know.**

Like people who ride motorbikes on a speedway, why do they do it for? You could get killed couldn't you?

**Were these flights important to you to break up your...**

I think it might have been when I look back on it, yeah. Yeah, a break in the continuity of what I was doing.

27:00 Yeah, it was quite possible but I used to go up a bit with our pilots as well.

**You didn't get R and R [rest & recreation] and R and C [rest & care] but did you get like a day off or anything like that?**

Occasionally things used to get pretty quiet on Sundays, believe it or not and occasionally I used to go down to the village of Da Long, which was about a mile and a half down the road from where we were and a mate of mine from the Australian Army Training Team was down there and I used to duck down there and

27:30 see him, have a few beers with him on a Sunday afternoon. He was down there with an ARVN unit and we'd have a couple of beers down there. One of the highlights of that one was that they had a beautiful big toilet block come laundry and all sorts of things for the ARVN people, the Vietnamese. And I said to him, I walked around this place and I said "What is this joint all locked up for?" And he said "Oh the Di Wee likes to", he's the captain,

28:00 "The Di Wee, he's in charge here, he likes to keep the place looking nice so that when he gets an inspection he takes all the locks off and takes people through." A crazy situation I'll tell you and all the ARVN troops used to live in little hootchies [makeshift tents] around the perimeter of the place with their wives and kids and it was a crazy setup, I'll tell you.

**Was there any danger in you like travelling to these places?**

Oh could have

28:30 been I suppose, yeah. Mainly in daylight you were pretty right. Coming on dark, a couple of times I came back from down there and it was coming on dark and if somebody had of been hiding over in the scrub they could have let fly at you and you wouldn't have seen where it come from. It might have been too late, it might have got between the eyes anyway but that's a risk you take. You are in a war zone.

**And this mate of yours, how did you spark up your friendship?**

I first met him when I was at 11 Field Regiment at Annerley.

29:00 I had to go and do an advanced driving instructors course over at Fraser Paddock over at Enoggera and he was the instructor on the course. He was an ex British Army bloke actually, a Second World War bloke and he was over there with the training team. I didn't know he was there but he found out I was there so I used to go and see him.

**What did you think of him being in this setup, this situation?**

Well that's a common thing for training team people, the Australian Army Training Team. They used to

29:30 go into a lot of situations like that. There was one situation up north from where we were. They got hit one night. There was two Americans and two Australian training team fellows up there and they nearly got wiped out. They came over the wire at them and everything but they stopped them. It was quite normal.

**You were talking about your trips in the air,**

30:00 **what kind of things would you see from the air and on the ground?**

Well depending on how high you're flying, lots of times you don't see anything much at all.

**Would you ever see the enemy?**

On odd occasions you'd go into an area, depending on what you were doing, if you were going from point A to point B, you don't stop and if you get into an area where it's known to be no friendlies and

30:30 you see somebody there the pilot will usually radio back and tell somebody about it and they'll probably send a gun ship or something like that but unless your specifically told to go into an area like that or if you're fired on, sometimes even if you are fired on you don't go in because you're going in as support to another unit or something else like that so you can't afford to stop. It just depends on the gravity of the situation but I was lucky I never got caught up in one of those.

**You said you went on gun ships**

31:00 **did you ever go in a situation where they were firing away?**

Only one that I remember. We went in and I didn't really see much at all because you've got a helmet on and you can't hear anything much and we landed in one particular area and the gunner got out and he had to race over to a command post and the pilot come up on the air command and he said "Will you jump on the end of that M60?" And there were some trees he pointed out and he said "Poke a few rounds in there for us just in case. I

31:30 think there's somebody in there." It was a hundred yards away so I sat there for a few minutes and popped a few rounds into it and I selected a few other areas and popped a few rounds in there too but that was about all.

**And what other things would you do when you had some time off, at camp for example?**

Go up to the mess and have a beer. In early days there wasn't much of that around. The only beer you'd get was Assari, which

32:00 was Japanese beer or Crown Lager, which was Korean but for the most part we used to drink bourbon and Dixie Cola. We didn't really start getting Australian beer until the later days, just before I went home. We did get Australian beer at one stage and it was Emu Draught, was it Emu? No, Swan, Swan

32:30 Lager and when you went in the mess to get a beer you had to buy some of this stuff. You couldn't drink it, it was terrible. It had been sitting on the wharf in Saigon for years they reckon, or quite a long time and you know, hot and cold, hot and cold, and you just couldn't drink it and not even the Yanks would drink it and they'd drink anything. So you used to have to buy one of these cans because when you went to army canteen services to buy your stuff you had to buy some so they could get rid of it and it was only ten cents a can and

33:00 you paid for it with script, which was the American occupation money type stuff. You didn't buy, dollars were non-existent. And so you had to buy it and throw it straight in the forty four gallon drum and later on we got Budweiser beer turned up. That was alright, not a bad drop and perhaps Blue Label and then shortly

33:30 after that they started bringing in Australian beer, mostly Victorian Bitter and Fosters. And all those blokes reckoned Victorian Bitter and Fosters and Reschs of course in New South Wales, were all the good beer, and then we said "Well righto, where is the Four XXX?" And it had already been there but the blokes that reckoned all their beer was the best was drinking ours, so we kicked a stink up about that so the Queensland units got Four XXXX beer.

34:00 **And you mentioned the Americans, were there many Americans in Nui Dat?**

Not a lot, no. Occasionally down on the strip the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] used to land down there, Air America and when they did one bloke would get out and stand on either side of the aircraft with a weapon in his hand. You couldn't go near them. They were special aircraft and they used to go up to Task Force Headquarters

34:30 and have a talk to our hierarchy and just what they were doing you'd never know. We had two American sergeants. They were with the FAC just along side of us. The American sergeant is equal to about a corporal in the Australian Army and that's about all really. And then of course in the Nui Dat area we had the American A Battery. They were huge big guns.

**What about the blokes which worked next to you in the?**

35:00 They are the ones I'm talking about, the FAC. There was a major and a lieutenant and I think two sergeants they had in there. That's about all they had.

**What were those blokes like?**

They were alright, no trouble at all. We had a bit of trouble trying to convince them that an American sergeant wasn't equivalent to an Australian sergeant because as you know you have a sergeants' mess and they said "God damn man, I'm a sergeant" and I thought "Oh well, I'll just let them go in and say nothing."

35:30 **And would you spin any yarns [tell them untrue stories] to them or?**

No, not really, no. The Americans as I found them are mainly very good blokes but they're very gullible. You can tell them anything half the time. I found the Yanks were okay, the ones that I mixed with anyway and as I said they were mostly regular troops, completely different to the conscript type fellows they sent over.

36:00 I was lucky, I had nothing to do with them. We had down in, a lot of people didn't realise that we had South Koreans in Vietnam too. The White Horse Brigade they called them and they were good troops but they were stationed in Vung Tau. Just up the road from us there was an American,

36:30 what was it called? It was like what they call a beach house or something the Americans called it and eventually they put a swimming pool in and stuff like that and it had been something of a feature there I think. It was pretty rugged and they used to go up there. I didn't bother.

**How did Nui Dat change over the time you were there?**

Well when we initially went there of course we were all in tents, everything was tents, the whole lot. There was no barbed wire around or anything so it was guard duty every night and in the pouring rain, it didn't matter what it was and

37:00 in later days of course the huge wire entanglements went up around the outside, claymore mines, everything was zeroed in on artillery and up there if they had a go at us they'd run into that sort of thing. But a lot of people don't realise that the Battle of Long Tan diverted an attack on the Task Force

37:30 Headquarters at Nui Dat, that's what they were after. They were coming in to have a go at us. It was just lucky or unlucky that D Company walked in on top of them and that pulled them up.

**Well tell us were there any attacks, mortars or anything?**

Yeah there was a mortar attack two days before I got to Nui Dat. Over from the Americans, apparently they worked out, they must have taken weeks to do it, they brought a couple of

38:00 eighty mill mortar zoos and what they did they gradually dug a hole until they got it big enough and they put the tube down, the mortar tube at the angle that they knew it would be fired at with a base plate down in the hole as well of course and then they came in and they buried ammunition and put that down. It must have taken them weeks to do it because we used to have clearing patrols every night and our blokes by the way used to do clearing patrols on foot. The Americans idea of a clearing patrol was that everybody

38:30 went out to the perimeter wire and opened up with everything they had. Didn't go out and walk around, you might get shot and with the result that they knew that and all they did was just lay in a depression in the ground and everything went over their heads and that's where they put them down. And they mortared the area and they lobbed a few in the artillery and a few in Task Force Headquarters and about half a dozen rounds landed in there. A mate of mine was asleep in his hutchie and he was lucky, he was right up against

39:00 the side of the sandbags and it ripped all the top out of his tent. But that's the only one really that they really had a go.

**And in the time you were there?**

That's in the time I was there but see the whole area after that and it was happening while I was there, they had bulldozers with a great chain and a big iron ball on it and the engineers used to drive around with a rifle across their laps and these things and just clear everything off and as I said

39:30 the Yanks didn't do that. They used to let the jungle grow right up on themselves and no wonder they got attacked all the time. You couldn't even see them coming.



## Tape 9

00:35 **Can you tell me about on your medals you've got the American Flight, can you tell me about...**

The United States Air Force.

**Yes?**

Well I don't know how I got that to be quite

01:00 truthful but in any case what happened was as I said was I flew a few times with them and this blow up, this other fellow that I was talking about, this happened prior to when I got that and what happened was I was down in my hutchie one day and one of my blokes rang up and said "There is an American major up here wants to talk to you". And I said "Oh yeah" and he said "Can you come up or whatever?"

01:30 And I said "Well I'm half way through having a shave" and I heard him say in the background "Tell him I'll come down and see him" because I wasn't that far away so he came down and he gave me that. And I said "What's this for?" And he said "Well the Americans have a situation whereby if you are on an aircraft and it's in an operational area then whatever happens in that area and a medal is awarded,

02:00 it is awarded to the aircraft and the people who are on it at that time." This is what he told me and I said "okay, fair enough and when did this happen?" And he said "I am not quite sure" he said "but the last aircraft" and the one I just spoke to you about "Was possibly the one when it happened but this particular aircraft might have got it over a period of time but if you happened to be on the aircraft you get it", if you know what I'm trying to say.

**Well what kind of aircraft was it?**

A Hughie helicopter, a gun ship.

02:30 He said "That's the only thing I can put it down to. Your name came up through certain people" and I said "okay, fair enough" and I said "Well what sort of authority am I going to get to wear it?" And he said "Well in due course we will send you a citation" and I said "Okay, fair enough." He said "Now can we have some sort of a parade to give this to you?" And I said "No way, no way, you're going to shoot me

03:00 down if you do that because people are going to find out what I've been up too and apart from the fact there is enough bloody poo hit the fan over this other bloke didn't do his job and the other fellow that's covering for him won't get his DFC probably." You know how funny things work in the army? And he said "Oh I can see the point." I said I'd be very happy if you'd just forget about it. And so I never wore it for years and when the last lot of medals came through it happened

03:30 to be in the box when I sent them to get mounted and the bloke just put it with them and I thought "I'm stuck with them, I've got to wear them now." That's it but no I call it my accident medal but it's no great deal because if you go to the 1st Airborne Division which was in Vietnam out of the thousands of men there are in a division I think they said there was five thousand of those

04:00 medals awarded to people on aircraft in the 1st Airborne Division in Vietnam, they issued that in eighteen months so it gives you some idea that it doesn't mean much but I'm quite proud to get it anyway.

**What other kinds of aircraft did you fly on in Vietnam?**

I flew in Chinooks and I flew in Cessnas

04:30 and I flew in the Siouxs and that's about the only ones I flew in over there.

**What's the difference in flying in those different kinds of aircraft?**

Well they're all different. I like choppers better.

**Why?**

Well it's probably reasonable to say that if a chopper gets hit and it's not hit too badly, if you have an engine failure or something like that and everything else is intact, including the big fan on top and the little one down the back they

05:00 can do what is called an auto rotation and what happens is as they go down they gradually apply pressure to the collective and it alters the pitch in the blades and virtually they do what's called a flare out before it hits the ground. In other words they reverse the prop, the main rotor altogether and that stops you from hitting the ground not so hard.

**Did this ever happen with you onboard?**

No it did not, thank God. I saw

- 05:30 it happen to one of the RAAF choppers and he was ordered to put down out from Nui Dat at one stage in time and he refused to do it and he managed to get it back to Nui Dat and landed it on the strip and he made a bit of a mess of the chopper but nobody got hurt. But that's why I do like choppers. One thing I don't like about them is if they shoot the tail rotor off you get a thing like this one that happened down a while back that crashed in the, the bloke that was doing fire ant thing.
- 06:00 The tail rotor parted company with the chopper, I believe that's what happened to him and what happens if that happens is you do pinwheels, you pinwheel around on the main rotor but if you can, if an engine failure does occur and you've got a bit of time and you can usually get it on the ground. An aeroplane, a normal fixed wing aeroplane if the fan stops on that you've got to look for something pretty quick to try and glide in and usually
- 06:30 they hit pretty hard and you don't walk away from it. But any landing you can walk away from is a good one anyway, even if the motor has stopped. That's an old saying amongst pilots.
- And what's it like to come under fire in a helicopter?**
- As I said I never really in my opinion felt a bullet hit anything or anything like that but that last one I was in and I didn't go up
- 07:00 again after that. I felt that there was quite a bit flying around there but I didn't see it and you can't hear it anyway because you've got ear muffs on.
- Well describe what you saw?**
- I didn't see very much at all.
- Well describe what you did see?**
- Oh what I saw, he virtually came down, we landed and the gunner on one side got out, and I got behind his gun and the skipper asked me to brass up this particular area over there which I did. He came back with a great armful of stuff and we then took off again but there was a lot of people around us.
- 07:30 You could see smoke in the bush where probably artillery rounds were landing and that sort of thing and the odd mortar but it's pretty scrubby and you don't see much.
- Was this the occasion with the green tracer?**
- Yeah, yeah but I never actually saw green tracers come towards me. I saw them out further where they were probably firing at other aircraft. No, I was lucky.
- Was there any other close calls in aircraft?**
- 08:00 **And would you go up in spotter aircraft at all when they...**
- Yeah I did go up a few times, yeah.
- Well tell me about how they worked?**
- Well you never saw much from there because when you fly in a spotter aircraft, a light aircraft, you either fly very low, close to the ground, which of course you can't see much anyway, or you get up very high where there is very little chance that you'll hit you anyway. So you're always in between that, in the
- 08:30 extremities or down low but I don't know if you've ever been in the trees or anywhere or down amongst a house and a chopper goes past and if he's low it's hard to tell which direction he is coming from and he's usually over and gone before you can get a shot at him anyway and that's why most choppers in those areas always fly low or up high.
- And when you'd go on these spotter flights what did you observe?**
- Well what you did is you sit in with your pilot and they fly over a specified area where they think
- 09:00 people might be and you just look out for movement on the ground. There is only one particular incident where I thought we'd sprung some enemy and it was our own blokes because on the ground, see they used to dress in black except for the North Vietnamese and I never saw any of them anyway. The normal Viet Cong used to always dress in black as a rule and I thought that these blokes down there were Viet Cong but they were our own and they were dressed
- 09:30 in jungle green, not camouflage, just jungle green they had in those days and they'd been wet and it just looked like it was black and they came very close to getting some rounds lobbed on them until we called up and they said "No, they're supposed to be there, they're ours" and that's the only ones I ever saw.
- So is that the role of a spotter plane to...**
- That's right, that's right and the other role they had with the choppers was resupply
- 10:00 of ammunition where it was needed in a hurry, only small amounts of course and the evacuation of wounded or bodies.

**Did you ever go on any of these?**

No, I was a good boy.

**What was your relationship like with most of the aircrew?**

Good, see most of the, in fact all of them in those days were on non corps postings. They could be any corps in the army and most

10:30 of them were civilian pilots and called up and done a quick sub lieutenant, second lieutenant, sub lieutenant is American, to gain their pip and they do a flying course. They used to do it in Sale in those days I think and then they go to Army Aviation and they are trained in the job to fly those particular aircraft. So if you were a fixed wing pilot in civil life and you

11:00 joined Army Aviation they would say "You can fly helicopters", change over.

**Why?**

Because they reckoned it was easier that way because they could train you to fly the chopper the way they wanted it or on the other side of the coin, fixed wing but they were still multi skilled. They could fly both but mostly on operations they flew the aircraft they were trained in for obvious reasons, that you do it the army's way and civilian pilots

11:30 might have bad habits.

**And what was the difference in these pilots given that they hadn't necessarily had an army background?**

Quite a few of them did. I spoke to you earlier on, Jim Campbell who was the chief test pilot for Westpac down the road down here, Jim was a corporal in the Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineers and he went and did the

12:00 commission for second lieutenant and also did a flying course at the same time so he went there as a corporal and got his commission on the job sort of thing but most of them were all very young fellows.

**Would you spend time with them socially?**

Quite often, yeah. They liked to drink on a hot day and every day was pretty warm.

**Was there any sort of, we talked of things you'd do on your off time but was there anything provided at Nui Dat, like movies, concert parties?**

They did have

12:30 concert parties, yes. Twice while I was there and Little Pattie was there on one if I remember rightly and I saw two of them while I was there and the bloke that plays the, what's his name? He's in England now, donk, donk, on the rattle boards, what was his name? Three legs?

13:00 Rolf Harris, yeah.

**What were they like the concert parties?**

Good, but you all sat on the ground and you didn't get very close to them. They just did it under a tarp over a frame sort of thing but most of those I seem to remember I didn't seem to manage much time watching those but what I saw of them was okay.

**As you got**

13:30 **towards the end of your tour how were you feeling about coming home?**

I was looking forward to it.

**Why?**

I had mini skirts going across in front of my eyes. No, I was looking forward to coming home naturally. You talk about frights, I got one fright. I got probably it was nerves and bronchitis and asthma and whatever and just about a week, ten days

14:00 before I came home so they sent me down to Vung Tau and I was in hospital there for a few days, antibiotics and so forth and I think I was about four days short of going home and my boys come down and got me in my Land Rover, two of them came down and as I said equipped with radio and we came out to a town called Baria and it had a blown out bridge. It had been blown out and I don't know whether it was when the French were there or when the Yanks went in, I don't know

14:30 but you can only go one way on it. If you were coming from Baria to Task Force area you go that way and the blokes on the other side waited and vice versa and just as we hit it one of the battalions short wheeled based Land Rovers came flying off, the quickest I've ever seen a vehicle come off a bridge backwards in my life and he had a row of bullets through the bonnet. And there was an armoured sentry on the corner of the bridge had a bullet through his shoulder so

- 15:00 we played chicken and pulled up very quick and I dived into the ditch alongside the road and it had a remote on the radio and it was always switched on anyway. So we dived in there and so I called Arti-tac up in Nui Dat. I could get them okay and told them what was going on and bearing in mind that there was paddy fields on both sides of that bridge, completely open and you couldn't see where the bullets were coming from, so obviously they weren't firing tracer
- 15:30 so they sent two gun ships down and brassed it up. But I was laying in the gully thinking "this is not happening to me. I am just about due to go home" but whether they hit anything or not I don't know but they stopped firing. So we casually went home from there.

**Casually?**

What else can you do? That's the only real fright I ever got I think.

**You had some what turned**

- 16:00 **out later to be PTSD from Malaya?**

Yes, so the psychiatrist told me. It probably had something to do with that trip up the Perak River. I don't know. You just don't know what brings these things on but they reckoned I probably had it as far back as then but I think they're only guessing.

**Well looking back at your time in Vietnam do you see any evidence of maybe that?**

Experiences?

**Well or effecting maybe some things that happened in Vietnam?**

Quite possibly

- 16:30 because it was stress all the time. You don't think there is any stress but that is the crux of PTSD and depending on where you are and what you are doing some people get it worse than others but see in the Second World War, I knew a bloke that I worked with in 11th Field Regiment, now he joined the army same age as I did in the Second World
- 17:00 War and he was a dead set PTSD bloke. He was like that and he went to New Guinea but he only went there in latter days but in the same token different people, nerves affect different people different ways but in an area like Nui Dat, I don't care where you were, there is always a stress factor. There is no doubt about that. I mean policemen get it, fire brigade people get
- 17:30 it but it wasn't recognised back in the old days. People used to say "He's just got bad nerves" or something like that. I know when I was a young bloke I used to see people shaking and whatever.

**What sort of differences do you think there were in you to when you first arrived in Vietnam to when you were leaving?**

Difference?

**Had you changed at all?**

I don't reckon I did but people

- 18:00 who saw me when I came home said that I did. Yeah, my family reckoned I was completely different person.

**In what way?**

Oh just my attitude, cranky, all sorts of funny things. I didn't know I was like it.

**Why don't you think you changed?**

Just what happens to you I suppose. How can you put a finger on that?

- 18:30 But it's definitely stress, there's no doubt about that. Stress causes PTSD, regardless of what sort of stress it is, that's my own opinion on it and I'm certainly no expert but I thought I didn't have it. I thought, late fifties well and truly out of Vietnam.

**What happened?**

I just crashed one day. I had the shakes and I sat down and I felt like things didn't want to work and all sorts of stuff. It was a terrible feeling.

- 19:00 **Had anything happened in the couple of days before that?**

No, just happened suddenly so I went and saw my doctor and he said "I know what's wrong with you and it's out of my field and I'm sending you to a psychiatrist." And I said "What do you think? I'm not mad." He said "No, you're not mad" he said "but you're out of my field". So that was it and that's when I found out I had PTSD.

**How did you feel when you found out?**

Well how are you supposed to feel? Give me some pills doc.

**Is that what you wanted?**

19:30 Well you've got choice in the matter. PTSD is something you'll never get rid of. It's here for life but I saw people that had PTSD and I thought "what's wrong with these blokes? Can't they hack the pace or something?" And then all of a sudden , bang, I got it.

**How does it affect you now?**

Oh I'm alright while I stay on medication. Certain aspects, if I get into a stressful situation and as I said I am vice president of Vietnam Veterans' Association and we had a bit of hiccup with a few people here before that caused a bit of stress

20:00 and I've been pretty much on edge for quite a while and just simple things like an interview, like you people have given me here, that causes a minor relapse.

**Well what kind of symptoms in this relapse?**

Very, very hard to explain.

20:30 You get shortness of breath, you hyperventilate and in some cases you get very bad headaches and you get bad pains in the stomach, which is only nerves of course and all you can do is take medication and wait for it to stop. It's not a bit funny and one

21:00 of the things I get, I had to go to the physiotherapist yesterday and I get blinding headaches and you can feel in the back of your neck when you get stress and all the muscles bunch up and I went and had a session with him yesterday and I felt like a new man when I came out but that's all brought about by the same thing.

**Do some symptoms come upon you at different times of the day?**

Yeah, you can be sitting here, like I can be sitting here, I have breakfast here occasionally

21:30 and I will be just sitting down reading the paper and the next minute I start to (demonstrates). You get blurred vision and I get a bit of, headaches come on you out of the blue, that sort of thing but some blokes get it really bad. They get fits of depression out of nowhere.

**Does that ever effect you?**

It effect everybody.

**Depression?**

Oh yeah.

22:00 Yeah, I had a very, very bad divorce set up before I met my current wife and I really got it then. I had a rifle and it was lucky it didn't have any bullets in it. I admit to that but it's nothing to be ashamed of.

**Were you seeing a psychiatrist previous to this?**

No, no.

**Do**

22:30 **you link that sort of depression that you had then to PTSD?**

Yes definitely. Once I explained it all to the, the psych people talk to you and they bring it all out of you and they've got ways of talking to you to find out these things and "you've had this for a while mate." But one of the things or three things that you can relate to PTSD some of the symptoms are heavy drinking, drugs.

23:00 **What kind of drugs?**

Well any sort of drugs, not in my particular situation but younger ones and workaholic is another symptom. People sort of push it to the back of their minds by work, work, work, work, work and that's exactly what I did.

23:30 Because I used to work, when I was in the transport game sometimes twenty four hours a day, just keep going and then go home and you'd do your normal stuff around home, cut the grass, and in the workshop and I rebuild Second World War jeeps and I never stopped.

**Did you have a problem with drinking at any time?**

No, I made very much sure I didn't have, although I do feel that at one stage for about

24:00 four or five years I drank pretty heavy. I used to knock off late at night and knock down about fifteen or twenty pots and then go home and climb out after four or five hours and go to work again but I was

getting a bit crook so I gave that away. But no I don't drink much now. I might have three or four of a night and that's all.

**You mentioned your involvement in the Vietnam Veterans' Association here, does talking to other veterans help?**

That's a very good therapy

24:30 but you'll only find that people that have the problem will only talk to other people in the same position and it does help. And the situation, we are involved in now with this drop in centre that we've got up here, it's a social and advisory set up that we've put up and the government is helping us finance it. We get a lot of Diggers come in and they won't talk to anybody else but they'll come and talk to you and

25:00 if we try and put on the line in relation to advocacy and or pensions and stuff like that that's what we're for and we don't only go for Vietnam veterans, any veterans at all. So if they want to drop in and have a cup of coffee, they can do that, the TV set if they want to watch it or if they just want to sit down and have a talk, it's all there and that's what it's all about. That's something the RSL [Returned & Services League] doesn't do.

**Is there anything particular,**

25:30 **you mentioned it could be random when you might feel some of these symptoms come on, is there something that might...**

Well you get panic attacks, that's another one you get and it's just like a panic attack and it's a very strange feeling and I explained it to my doctor and it's pretty hard to explain to anybody and you get a panic attack and you hyperventilate and you sit down and shiver goes up your spine and stuff like that.

**Is there any**

26:00 **thing that might trigger it as well? Any noises or?**

Things can do, yeah, yeah, loud noises are not real funny sometimes. Sometimes they affect you and sometimes they don't.

**How about helicopters?**

No, not me. I haven't been in a light aircraft since I got out of the army, can you believe?

**Did you ever have any trouble with dreams?**

All the time.

26:30 I've had some that would make your hair curl.

**What kind of things do you dream about?**

I don't think I want to discuss that. But you do get, and all blokes that suffer from PTSD will tell you the same thing that you get dreams that are absolutely not even related to war service, just absolute crazy dreams.

27:00 And my wife, one of the reasons she doesn't sleep with me is because in the middle of the night I start throwing punches and all sorts of things, jumping around the bed and she reckons I can go that high off the bed horizontally. You don't even know you are doing.

**You hear people talk about things like flashbacks, does that have any sort of?**

I've had a couple of those, nothing I want to talk about.

**Do they relate to specific experiences?**

Oh yeah.

27:30 **Well when you look back what are those experiences that have particularly effected you?**

I don't want to talk about them. I've seen a few things and I don't want to talk about it.

**Things relating to war service?**

Oh yeah.

**Things in Vietnam? Well talking about Vietnam again**

28:00 **just tell me about how they brought you home?**

It's like they explain in the papers, one minute you're a soldier in a combat area and twenty four hours later you're on the streets walking around in Australia and it's pretty hard to adjust too. I flew from Nui Dat in a Caribou and I landed in Saigon and

28:30 two hours later I was on a Qantas aircraft headed for Australia.

**How does this effect you?**

Well it does affect you. You don't think it does but I landed in Sydney and there was an engineers strike on the aircraft, flight engineers, and the only aircraft flying were those little Fokker Friendships and stuff like that so I'm stranded in Sydney. I live in Brisbane

29:00 and I had told my then wife that I was due home on whatever and what we had to do was they land you in Sydney and you had to pay a bit extra to get a flight home from Sydney. That was okay, didn't worry me and I landed there and of course they say "There's going to be about a six hour, seven hour delay, at least." So I thought "This is nice and I've got a pocketful of American money and not an Australian coin to my name" and I thought "Oh well" and I got onto, it was the PMG

29:30 in those days, and I got onto a girl on the switchboard and told her where I was and where I had come from and I said "I haven't got any money in my pocket and I want to try and tell my folks what's going on" and she said "That's no problem, have you got the phone number?" And I said "Yeah" and she said "Righto" and she put me through and she said "You can talk as long as you like" and I didn't have to pay for it so that was one of the good things that happened to me.

30:00 And then when I landed in Brisbane the first thing anybody said "Have a look at the colour of his hair." It was nice and black when I went to Vietnam but it wasn't when I come home.

**What colour was it?**

Grey, like it is now.

**Why?**

Grey, what hair I had because it was pretty shaved down and wearing one of those all the time is too hot and it was all white.

30:30 **When had that happened?**

Well I sort of didn't notice it happening. I still had a few black ones there I suppose but it certainly never occurred to me and then when I landed home I borrowed a caravan off a mate of mine and I went to the Gold Coast straight away on leave and I stayed down there for seven days and I ended up having to go to doctors down there with stomach complaints and stuff like that, and all

31:00 it was when I think back on it was straight out nerves.

**Did you manage to relax at the Gold Coast?**

Not for quite some time. Well how could you? It would be the same as getting involved in a very bad car smash, wouldn't it? Then stroll across the road and sit down and try and have a meal, you couldn't do it could you?

31:30 **How aware were you of - that's a pretty good analogy - so how aware were you of that, of that was how you were feeling?**

Oh I didn't really. I knew I just wasn't feeling real good. In fact I was feeling bloody awful but I gradually got better. Went and had a few beers and went around and there was a couple of zoos around the place and as the days went by I relaxed a bit better but I had problems with stomach cramps and stuff

32:00 and I went back to Amberley because our unit was out at Amberley in those days and I went to an air force doctor. Now this just goes to show you how much they knew about PTSD and that's way back then and he said "Go and have a drink of water and a couple of aspirins, that will fix you." And when I look back on it, that's when the PTSD first started. And I went to a doctor called Campwell, at Oxley, when I lived there

32:30 and that was only shortly after I came home and I think he knew because he gave me valium.

**How did the valium help?**

I don't remember that it worked all that well but by the same token very, very shortly after he gave me valium I read a bit about it in the paper and the effects and so forth that it does to people so I tipped them down the dunny and didn't take any more. It was shortly after that

33:00 when I got out anyway and when I look back I turned into the workaholic bit and workaholic and a few too many beers and that kept me going.

**When you look back do you think that even though you managed to pass Canungra, do you think that they still should have let you go?**

Why not? I passed all the medicals. The army didn't know I was on a twenty percent

33:30 Veterans' Affairs pension and I wasn't going to tell them. That was bad communication between departments.

**You came back fairly early on from Vietnam, was there any kind of anti...**

I was back in 1967. No there was no people, there was none of this Labor Party bloody garbage they were carrying on about they were carrying on about people in Vietnam in those days. I never struck any of that. I did once. Oh yeah. I forgot about that one.

34:00 I was at a party in a high class area in Clayfield one night and I ran into a couple of university students and an airline pilot, who were very vocal about Vietnam and so forth and I was having a few drinks and one thing led to the other so I dusted two of them up and I got thrown out of that party. I can't understand why. One of the things I asked them at the time, especially the university

34:30 students, is "You are trying to tell me I don't know anything about Vietnam, where do you get your wealth of knowledge from? Have you been there?" "Oh that doesn't matter, Professor So and So was telling us all about this." Oh, that was like waving a red flag at a bull. You can imagine how I felt but it was later on down the track when they were starting all this anti,

35:00 Gough Whitlam [former Prime Minister of Australia] and Bob Hawke [Former Prime Minister of Australia] and all those bloody idiots started all this crap.

**When did you get out of the army?**

I got out on the 29th of January, 1969, at half past three in the afternoon.

**And when you were doing some of the, you mentioned that later on in the army you were involved in the**

35:30 **transportation of troops, organising how they got from different places?**

That was when I was in 163 Reconnaissance Flight. It was no aircraft, it was just Jim Campbell and myself and a driver and a clerk and what it was to relay some of the paperwork from the headquarters people through to me and all I did was make sure that people got vaccinations, medicals and stuff like that for Vietnam and

36:00 other places. People were going to New Guinea and things like that. It was quite an easy job really but I wasn't a clerk and I didn't like flying a table.

**Well when you look back at all your experience in the army?**

I'd do it again.

**Why is that?**

Because I would.

**Why?**

I don't know. Why do people continue to ride motorbikes? Why do people go as test pilots in aeroplanes?

36:30 **Even if you consider the effect it's had on your health in later life?**

Yeah, I think I would.

**What would you say has been your best experience in the army?**

Oh gee, that's a hard one, good heavens, I don't know how to explain that one, my best experience in the army? I don't think I could come up with one.

37:00 **Worst experience?**

I could write a book about that. You wouldn't know where to start, wouldn't know where to start on a subject like that one. But no, I don't think best experiences really come to light to military service unless you have really achieved something because I don't think I, I just did my

37:30 job as I saw it and that's all there was too it and in most cases I was quite happy with how I did it. And in some cases my superiors didn't quite think so because I was, as I was in younger life, fairly outspoken but it's not a recipe for promotion in some cases.

38:00 **What sort of lessons in life did your time in the army teach you?**

Not a lot. I think I learnt more lessons after I got out and got into business. In the army you wore a flak jacket to stop bullets hitting you in the back and the front but in civilian street flak jackets were no good. I've met some of the nastiest people I've met in my life when you get in business for yourself out in civvy street [civilian life].

38:30 At least in the army you had mates and you could trust them.

**We're coming to the end of this tape. Do you have anything you'd like to say? Any final words or things you think we haven't bought up or talked about?**



No, not really. I think we've covered everything haven't we? I've bared my soul to coin a phrase. No, I don't think so, no.

39:00 I think I'm going, in satisfactory, but it's not military life, but since I've been involved with the Vietnam Veterans' Association I'm moving into a situation that I'm very right into. I want to help other Diggers who have had the same problems as I've had and there is a lot of them out there and a lot of them are still coming out of the woodwork. Because they are in the same

39:30 time frame as I was before anything happened, if you know what I'm saying? And Hervey Bay I've been told has probably got and will get the biggest population of ex Vietnam veterans in Australia. See we've got sixty odd people in this one that we've got running now and we've only been going twelve months. Because we're offering a service that

40:00 the other sort of, Australia wide this is, that other service organisations don't sort of come into because there is a lot of people that don't want to go to RSLs and muck around with poker machines and drink and all this sort of thing. A lot of people have had marital problems and go into an area like we've got here and relate to people who have been through the same things that they have. Well you don't get that in normal civil life and I think it's a, I'm pushing very hard to get it

40:30 as good as I can.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**