Australians at War Film Archive

Keith Anderson (Doc) - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:40 **Righto. If you just introduce yourself and we'll go from there.**

I'm Keith Andrew Anderson. I was born in Sydney, the suburb of Paddington at Crown Street Women's Hospital on 8th October 1937. My father was Charles Anderson, a painter, and my mother Mina Anderson.

01:00 They were both 23 years old. Shortly after I was born we moved out to Auburn and then the Second World War started. My father went away with his brother, Les, and his brother-in-law, Arthur Bromwich. They both joined the 2/17th battalion. It was raised in Sydney and the actual battalion was formed up at Ingleburn Camp and just prior to them going to the Middle East they

01:30 marched up to Bathurst. They marched through the city of Bathurst, then I believe they marched back again. Then they went across. They did Tobruk and Alamein. When they left the Middle East they came home to retrain at Atherton. Then they went to New Guinea and then Borneo and then they came home. So I spent most of my younger days without a father.

02:00 The thing that I remember most is my mother's bravery and the lessons that our mothers taught us in those days. They'd just survived a depression and there they are – Mum with two small children – trying to live on a warrant officer's wages, which wasn't very much. But Gayle and I, my sister, we never went without a thing. Then after the war there were four more sisters and a brother.

02:30 I joined the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] cadets. It was the 1st Heavy Ack-Ack [anti-aircraft] Regiment at Hawthorn Parade, Haberfield, in Sydney and we used to go away for weekend bivouacs and sit on the back of these monstrous trucks and fire these three point seven anti aircraft guns into the sky at drone targets and things like that. They taught us the predictor and the tracker. Then we did our share in the

03:00 kitchen peeling potatoes and all the marvellous stuff. One night at Haberfield a fellow called Teddy Howe came to see me. He was also a cadet. He said, "Up in the orderly room on the noticeboard there's a sign and it says if you want to join the army you can join at fifteen." So I flew up there and had a look. There it was, the army apprentices' school and the list of trades and I wanted to be a plumber and there it was, plumber. So I got an application form

03:30 and I went home that night, knocked on my Dad's and Mum's bedroom door and I said, "Look, I've got this. I want to join." So Dad read it, looked at Mum and he signed it there and then. I don't know whether it was trying to get away from them or whether they were trying to get me away from the house. Anyway I went to the army apprentices' school on 28th January 1953. Dad took me to the railway station at Central. There was a fellow there called Jock Maguire and a draft conducting officer,

04:00 a corporal. This is my introduction to the army. And he yelled out in his Scottish accent, "If you're not in the train when it leaves the station you'll miss it." And Dad said, "How profound. You're in good hands." So away I went. So I was a plumber and I joined the band. And that got you out of a lot of other silly duties and things. As a drummer. We played in Brisbane a few times.

04:30 Had a lot of trips around. That was good. The trade itself, I'd commend that to anyone. We did it in

three years instead of the four. The instructors were army. Most of the teachers for our education were army fellows and it came from the RMIT. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. All of our training itself. The three years went very quickly.

05:00 When you go into a place like that and you're fifteen and the fellows in the senior class are eighteen there's a big difference. We just had to take a lot of punishment. Had to watch your socks when you washed them and you couldn't walk away from your laundry or anything. But it taught us how to be soldiers, how to be men. The instructors that we got on the army side had just come back from Korea. They were really good blokes. They had their cold wet weather boots and all their ribbons and stuff. They were

05:30 real tough and we thought they were good. So with my father's background and the two uncles and these fellows, all I wanted to do was just be infantry. Anyway I graduated from the apprentices' school in the December of '55 and they posted me to 17 Construction Squadron at Randwick in Sydney. You do a journeyman year the fourth year and that was good. We played a lot of good rugby.

06:00 The Royalists and all those chaps used to come across from New Zealand and play. And because we were all tradesmen and most of us were ex-apprentices the fellowship there was just marvellous. We're still mates today most of us. So you go back to '53 to today, that's a long time and we're still mates. It's good. After the year, when I'd finished my journeyman year, they called for volunteers to go to Malaya. 2 Battalion had just come home. So

06:30 they formed what they called 2 Troop Royal Australian Engineers and we set sail on the New Australia, a ship, from Sydney Harbour. It was twenty thousand tons and there were women and children, the dependents of the infantry fellows mainly. There would have been about fifty of us, I guess, in this contingent. We got up to almost Thursday Island. It was

07:00 late in the afternoon, almost dark, and they'd handed out the two long necks of beer as our beer ration for that day. And there we are, they take the tops off so you can't take them down to the cabin, we'd just had the first mouthful of beer and there's a honking of horns and sirens and what had happened, we'd picked up the bridge of the Franstow, a French oil tanker in the channel and they tore our anchor chain

07:30 right along the starboard side of the front of the ship, so we had to stop. Anyway, Francis Xavier Crow, who is dead now – God love him – Frank was a lieutenant in 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] and he was telling us to throw the beer overboard. The comments he got. So anyway we kept our grog. It was pretty orderly and they sent all the women downstairs for their lifejackets and everything and the children. They come up and they did their boat stations and everything.

08:00 But all the sea was on fire. It was pretty dramatic and a lot of the people were pretty scared about it. Anyway eventually we got away from the flames and things settled down. The Franstow went on its way, but we couldn't. So they sent us across on whale boats from the ship to a little island and we got sand in whatever containers we could fit the sand in. Of course, we didn't have any clothes to do that sort of work in so there we are naked

08:30 running round. They had these hammerhead sharks. We're trying to spear them as a bit of relief. Anyway we didn't know but all the women were watching us from the ship with binoculars. So it wouldn't have been much of a sight anyway, I guess. So they brought us back to the ship and we took the sand aboard and with the dunnage or timber that we had the engineers were given the task of shoring up the side of the ship so that the carpenters

09:00 put in the formwork and we had to drink as much beer as we possibly could because we didn't have any aggregate. So we smashed the glass up from the bottles to make the aggregate to make the concrete. We poured that into the side of the ship. Anyway we limped up to Singapore and what should have taken a few days took us a long time. Anyway, no-one got hurt. We were on water rations so we had to drink beer instead of the fresh water and the fresh water was given to the women and children.

09:30 That was good. Another thing I can remember. We were a good day out from Singapore and you could actually smell it. You could smell Singapore that bad. In 1957 Lee Kuan Yew hadn't taken over. He didn't take over until '58 and another thing that's always stayed in my mind – the contrast from Singapore in September in '57 and I was only nineteen then to when I went back again the next year and then in subsequent years when you go back

10:00 every ten years the difference that man made to the place and the way he reclaimed the shoreline and everything – just amazing. And the Victoria Street Canal and all that sort of thing. Just a different place. And when you go from Singapore to Johor Bahru to the markets it's like going to another world. Anyway they took us in covered trucks and they had anti grenade bars on the side so the CTs [Communist Terrorists] couldn't throw grenades

10:30 at us. We got to Kota Tingi. We stayed in Kota Tingi for a couple of – about three weeks I guess – acclimatisation normally takes two weeks. We did the schooling there. How to handle these new weapons and everything. Then they moved us north by train to a place called Butterworth which in near Penang in the northern part of Malaya. We had a pretty good camp. It was atap [matting made from coconut leaves] huts.

11:00 Hard standings. We had a lot of plant and equipment and trucks. We'd stay there for at most a week. But that was 11 Independent Field Squadron Oil Engineers. Because the food was so bad – we used to

get, I think it was seven [shillings] and six [pence] a day to eat their rations, so we'd go to the cha [tea] well with these Pakistani fellows and they'd have banjos they call them, they were bread rolls with cheese and tomato

11:30 and stuff like that, banana, to supplement our rations. Geez, it was terrible. So we were on twenty eight pounds a fortnight as our pay plus this food allowance. So we thought we were pretty flush fellows. And compared to the Brit national servicemen we were. They didn't get much at all. One thing I forgot to tell you, on the ship – the New Australia when we were ashore getting the

12:00 sand all the ladies that were on the ship – they were Australian ladies and they were pretty young – they decided that why should these lucky fellows be able to swim on this beautiful island and they couldn't swim at all. They asked the captain if they could swim alongside the ship. The captain said, "Oh no, no you can't do that because of the sharks." They said, "Oh yes. He's having us on." So he put over the PA [Public Address] system for all the women to gather by a stairwell

12:30 and they threw the scraps in the galley over the side and the sharks you saw. That was the end of that argument. They didn't want to do that again. When we left Butterworth, we had a lot of jobs. One was to build a road from a place called Naka to a place called Sik on the Thai-Malay border. There were a lot of terrorists up there.

13:00 It's interesting, there's a place called Sungai Petani and in Malay "Sungai" means "river" and "Petani" means "a family of farmers" or "a district of farmers." They call them Petani People. Those people had moved because of the CTs – the communist terrorists. They'd moved north and we had to build

13:30 the road from scratch. There was a road in existence that only went to their farms. It was not passable to vehicles. It was nearly all elephant traffic. We pulled down all the trestle bridges that they'd made of wood and we started then and replaced everything with concrete. Built concrete bridges. The road was surfaced with laterite which is basalt, a reddy soil that you might see. It's interesting. I'll try and remember to talk

14:00 later about the soil structures in South Vietnam and how you can find where people are that live in the ground when they build bunkers. But basalt is one of the soils you can actually dig away with a pick or a shovel and a hoe and the walls will stay like a wall in a house. But it makes an impervious road surface which is pretty good. That's what we did. We built this road from Naka to Sik. To give us a break every now and then we'd go down and stay with 3 Battalion.

14:30 They were at a place called Kuala Kangsar which is south of Kuala Lumpur and north of Singapore. They had the companies in outposts at Lin Tan, Kuala Kangsar itself, Lassa and Sungai Siput. We were billeted out with A Company out at Lassa and we used to go on ambush of a night with them. Had a jukebox in this tent. Don't think this is anything flash. They were just

15:00 worn out old tents. A Company 3 RAR had taken them over from another company from 2 Battalion that had been there for their two years. The jukebox was supplied by a Chinese contractor. Now he's trying to make money out of this. And Australians are Australians and will always be Australians, thank God. But it had two slivers of bamboo – I've got to use my hands for this, excuse me. But it goes A B C D E F and then 1 2 3 4 5 6 to ten.

15:30 I didn't do this by the way. You hold the sliver under the letter A and you press it so it can't move and you go from one to ten. Then B and go from one to ten and through the thing. So the jukebox plays forever for no money. But when you're ambushing and you're young – I was twenty at this stage – and you're up the river a fair way, you wouldn't think that you could hear anything from the camp, and you couldn't hear any voices or anything like that. But around

16:00 eight, eight thirty, nine o'clock, you'd hear this boom boom and we'd wonder what the hell, you know? Could see cannibals coming out with bones through their nose and terrorists and all this sort of stuff coming out. But it wasn't. We tracked it down – it took us a long time – it's the juke box. We had the bass turned up in the juke box and it was coming up the river. Siting camps. Engineers are taught all these wonderful things.

16:30 It's not prudent to put the latrines and the cookhouse upriver from the camp. Mickey Mouse could figure this out. But I think somebody had dropped decimal point somewhere because we all got very sick one night and we'd had wheel meat. It's white like a roll like devon.

What's the meat?

We call it wheel meat. It's the shape of wheel, like a circle like devon, salami, the sausage type stuff. And it was white. They

17:00 churned it off in slices for us. Sick. They had thunderboxes, rows of them, but not enough for this emergency. Like, a rifle company plus engineers staying with them. There we are with blankets around ourselves queuing up, in terrible trouble and some of the more optimistic fellows have got torches and books thinking they're going to sit there and enjoy the night. It was terrible.

17:30 There's a fellow, Claude Ducker. Claude's infantry. We later met up again in 1 RAR and in fact Sonia and I took over his married quarter. But Claude got an MC [Military Cross] while we were there. He was sent out with some tracker dogs to chase these people down and I think there was three men and a

woman from memory. They got them. Our fellows went in and carried the bodies out.

18:00 I think with Malaya the most important things that I'd like to relate about is the hardship of living there, how hard the jungle is to move through, the heat and the rain, and the way everything goes mouldy. But the thing that made it more sensible to me or made it more purposeful – the

18:30 task that we had was simplified by the professionalism of the British. I often reckon if the British had been running Vietnam it would have been a far different outcome and a different story altogether. Just as an example, in logistics, a private soldier is issued with – well everybody's issued, but just say a private soldier – a number five jungle carbine rifle. That's a 303 rifle similar to the ones that they used

19:00 in the Second World War only it's stripped down a little bit and the butt itself has got a rubber pad. The front end where the bayonet is affixed is cut away and instead of the normal muzzle it's got a flash eliminator on it like the Bren gun had. It held the same magazine of ten rounds. But the weapon itself has a serial number. In the army anything that's worth it has got a serial number. And the bolt that fits into the rifle

19:30 has a serial number. Those two numbers have to marry up all the time. When you go out on a patrol with that weapon you get issued with fifty rounds of 303 ball ammunition in a bandoleer. You take the first ten out and put them into your magazine of your weapon and you put the two little clips that hold them into the first slot that's been vacated in the belt in the magazine – in the bandolier it's called.

20:00 You're given two – they were Mills bombs. 36Ms from the Second World War. You were given two of those and you took them along to the platoon sergeant and he put the fuses in and crimped or splayed the pin. They had an A pin that you pulled out. Splayed it so it couldn't fall out. Then he taped the striker lever with electricians tape. You carried that in the bottom of your left-hand basic pouch.

20:30 And away you went. Now, if you fired that rifle for any reason you had to have a body – preferably one of the communist terrorists – or a darned good explanation. And in any case you had to pick up the spent cartridge case and bring it back so the CTs couldn't reload it and make ammunition to fire back at us. All of these weapons were kept securely in an arms coach and that was recorded.

21:00 When you came in it was recorded and when you took it out, it was recorded and you had to sign for it. By contrast, in Vietnam on the first trip with 1 RAR I had the assault pioneer platoon and we were issued with an Owen gun for the officers and the scouts. The soldiers had the SLR, a self loading rifle, 762 that took the place of the 303 rifle. And the

21:30 GPMG, the general purpose machine gun. An M60. We were issued with two M76 grenades, Yank grenades. But that wasn't recorded the same way it was in Malaya. I just can't remember now if the weapons were recorded in our army book 83 or not. I don't know. But on the second trip – that was '65 the first trip –

22:00 1969/70 I was 2IC [Second in Command] D Company with 8 Battalion. Weapons were everywhere. And during the first trip I noticed that the Viet Cong themselves had very poor standard of weapon. They come from all sorts of places. They were single shot rifles and M1 carbies from the Second World War. Some of Russian origin.

22:30 They had the Chinese sub machine guns – the same as they're using now, and the Kalashnikov rifles, SKS they call them. But they were pretty poorly equipped. But on the second trip it was a different story. And they had the armour light rifle, the M16, the same as we had. And I'm sure they had the GPMGs if they wanted them. They had grenades, they had

23:00 our mines that we put in a minefield. And that's another lesson that people could learn from this. Minefields are a barrier. I'm talking about anti personnel mines or anti tank or both. They're a barrier. They're only useful if they stay where they're put. They're placed deliberately. They're marked usually with a sign to say it's a minefield. And there's a barbed wire fence on either side of it

23:30 to stop easy access or accidental access to it. But they're no good unless they're covered by observation and fire. So you have to have at least machine guns there all the time that can cover the whole area and observation. And unfortunately Australians didn't do this and they laid a monster of a minefield and it was all M16 mines, so anti personnel mines and they lifted them. They sent young kids in there

24:00 and lifted them and used them against us with great effect. Specially 8th Battalion really copped it. So that's the contrast with the personal weapon and the scale of the ammunition that's issued. Honest, with the second trip we could lift the floorboards up of the tents we were in and there'd be all sorts of grenades and belts of M60 ammunition. Just incredible. It'd pop your eyes. If the tents

24:30 had have caught fire it would have been like Guy Fawkes night. Could never fathom this. And the waste. I could tell you stories about the cavalry – Mel Gibson made a movie not so long ago about it – We Were Soldiers, or Once Were Soldiers or something. You see today Americans with a big colour patch on their shoulder. It's yellow with a black line through it and a black horse's head.

25:00 Later, my batman, Kenny Sleep and myself were sent up there and I spent a fair time at Black Horse, but before we arrived up there when the Americans actually had control of that and they had to scoot for some reason I was told by the Vietnamese army that they had bulldozers. They bulldozed trenches

as big as this house and put big boxes of green trousers, green shirts, poncho liners, all sorts of stuff.

25:30 One bloke was trying to tell me they even put a helicopter in there. Just amazing the waste. And if you saw the film of when the Americans finally left Vietnam and they couldn't get everything onto the aircraft carriers and they were ditching them into the ocean, that makes an infantry soldier cry. You've just got no idea of the waste. In Malaya we had no drugs. I'm talking about the stuff they smoke today and inject

26:00 into themselves – heroin and cocaine. If it existed in the civil population it was a different story. But it didn't exist with the soldiers themselves. British or Australian or the New Zealanders. We got our enjoyment from run and coca cola and we frequented a place at Penang called the White House.

26:30 We had some spectacular nights. We used to get three days off every three weeks. We weren't millionaires. Didn't have a lot of money. But the money we had we drank wisely. I spent my twenty-first birthday on the roof of the Cathay Hotel in Leith Street Penang. There was a mob of Maori and they were the only ones who were still on leave that coincided with the time I was on leave.

27:00 The Poms – sorry, the British soldiers, I'd never be derogatory about them because they're great guys, but we used to call them Poms – they used to drink Tops and it was beer, Anchor or Tiger beer made in Malaya and they top it up with lemonade in a pint pot, that's all they could afford. The Maori at the end of the night went round and pinched these

27:30 when the guys went to the toilet or weren't looking and we passed them up to each other up onto the roof of the Cathay Hotel. That's where I spent my twenty-first birthday with about eight Maori singing Hoki Mai and all this nonsense they go on with. Anyway in the morning the sun had just come up and the Malay police come along and they were pretty good fellas and they said, "All right, whose party was it?" They said, "It's his." "Did you have a good time?" "Yeah." "It's over now fellas, come on down." We all went down like little lambs and the coppers drove us to the ferry and we got the ferry back to

28:00 Butterworth. Good fun. We used to travel – they used to call us Johnson's Gypsies. Max Johnson was the captain, our OC [Officer Commanding]. Real good fella. He was married and had his family up there. Had tip trucks and for economy they'd put us in the back of these tip trucks, but it wasn't just us. It was a bedside locker

28:30 which is about a metre by a metre by eighteen inches deep. That'd hang your clothes. I don't know what clothes you were supposed to hang because you only had greens. And a few undergarments and socks and stuff. And you had your bed which was an iron bed with this coir mattress and a pillow and a blanket, two sheets and a pillow slip and that'd be all rolled up. So they'd put the

29:00 wardrobes in, the beds on top of that and us on top of the beds. A rollicking old ride from Butterworth up to the Thai border – it's a long way – on the back of these trucks. You'd get there and they'd allocate your tent lines. There were no walls in the tent that I can remember. It was just the tops. You'd settle yourself in and away we'd go to work. Now our work dress in those days was a pair of jungle boots,

29:30 pair of khaki socks or grey socks, Bombay bloomer shorts – style, man, style. And a British red belt. Two water bottles. Your bandoleer of ammunition and your number five jungle rifle and one of those little sun hats. You know those jungle hats. You

30:00 wouldn't worry about a shirt. To clear the road ahead we'd have one guy, a corporal, with an axe and another couple of blokes with him and a battalion of the royal Malay regiment would come to protect us. And they'd go off to the side of the road out of their trucks and their trucks'd go back. They used to just walk about twenty feet into the jungle, form a circle or either go to sleep and put their rice on. And they're protecting us.

30:30 To build the road itself you had to cut the vines down first so the dozers could knock the trees over. And eventually we'd follow that up with scrapers. Forget the name of the other thing – a grader that'd grade the road. When we had trouble with springs you had to cut and fill because there's no way of importing a lot of earth in to make the road level. So you cut the tops off the hills and fill the valleys.

31:00 And if there's a spring in there in the rice paddy you're in trouble. So you'd send the soldiers in, you'd find the spring and then you've got to try and divert it or seal it. Now, the heat. You've heard – I suppose you have. In Vietnam the Yanks used to wear their steel helmets all the time and their brains would boil. So they'd say. I've never seen it myself. But it gets very hot. And we'd work out in the middle of the paddy field dressed

31:30 as I said and I think – Tommy Rivers his name was, one of our soldiers – he just went crackers. They reckon that's what happened, his brain had boiled. He grabbed his rifle and he was off and he was going to do this and he was going to do that. I don't know what he was going to do. But that was pretty distressing. In the main it was a pretty happy time. We had canteens in the night and they'd give us a couple of cans of beer.

32:00 VB [Victoria Bitter] and Fosters. But some twit in Australia decided to put a chemical in it to preserve it. So why preserve something for an Australian to drink? As soon as you get it, you drink it, don't you? You don't hang on to it. So I don't know what that was all about. But it didn't taste the same as it does today. I never blame Fosters or VB for that. It's just one of those things. The meals were adequate but as I said

we had to supplement them.

32:30 The leave was good. At one stage they asked me if I would like to go to Hong Kong. You know, when you're twenty you think, oh whacko, this'll do me. So Allan Price and myself volunteered. We went on a truck down to Butterworth, a train down to Singapore, and we stayed at a motel or a hotel in Singapore and we got on a troopship – the Nevasa – a British troopship. We worked our passage. We had to pay some money, but

33:00 it was nothing. They fed us on board. I mean, we had to polish brass railings, it was nothing. It was just a great trip. Pricie and I got up to Hong Kong. We were in Kowloon and we stopped at a hotel called the Peninsula. Pricie thought, this looks rather good, we'll move in here. We were

33:30 in civilian clothes and I said, "All right, I'll book us in. You go and get us a beer," because I knew darned well they wouldn't let us stay there. We couldn't afford it. So Pricie fell for it and he went over and he got these two beers and he came back and there's a Chinese fellow standing behind me. He said, "Excuse me, you're Australians." We said, "Yeah." He said, "I heard you ask about how much it cost here. I don't want to be rude, but I've just come back from Sydney and the people there really

34:00 spoilt me. I'd like to return the favour. I own a restaurant in Jordan Road which is just off Nathan Road and I'll let you stay there – not at the restaurant, but at my mother's house which is straight across the street and that's eleven Hong Kong dollars a day." They were one and six Australian each, I think, the dollars in those days. Well Pricie and I went for this. But, like as I said, steak knives, there's more. He offered us a cup of tea when we woke up served by his

34:30 mother. Breakfast at his restaurant, morning tea at his restaurant, lunch at his restaurant, afternoon tea at his restaurant, dinner at his restaurant, supper courtesy of his mother. And she did our washing and ironing. You couldn't beat it. He had one brother that was a tailor and he made us pants and shirts and didn't want to charge us for it. Another brother had a – what do you call it – a limousine service. And he went all around new territories and he drove us

35:00 wherever we wanted to go whenever he was free. He'd take us to places and tell us about things we should see. Just a remarkable trip. Anyway, Pricie and I got across to Macau and in Macau the Portuguese owned it in the fifties. It was one of the sorriest places I've ever seen in my life. I don't know if you've ever been there. But the thing that sticks in my mind is the China Gate. There were Portuguese on one side in a sentry box and there might have been two or three of them.

35:30 With 303 rifles. And on the gate itself and beyond the gate were hundreds of Chinese soldiers. I thought, the odds weren't real flash there. The main thing in Macau in those days was gambling. We couldn't afford that. We were offered all sorts of sights and things to go and see. Thank God we just didn't have enough money to go and see those things. So we came back home. We did two years in

36:00 Malaya and it finished in the September. 1 RAR came up and relieved us and another engineer troop. We went home on a ship called the Flaminia, a beautiful Italian vessel. Again about twenty thousand tonne. It had wonderful food and gelato. And the beer was good. It had no preservatives in it. It was Australian beer. That was an uneventful enjoyable trip. And we got home and they sent us out to

36:30 Casula at the School of Military Engineering. It's out near Liverpool west of Sydney. Then they split us into two again and they said, "Half of you will go to Wacol in Brisbane and become 7 Squadron, the other, 1 Squadron will stay down here at Casula." Which we did. We had made a convoy. I was driving with a fellow called Rasmussen – either a truck

37:00 or a ferret scout car. Now I'd drive Pigs, Bedford armoured personnel carriers – eleven ton of Bedford. They called them coffins as well. They carry a section of infantry and the driver and the gearbox is behind you. So I drove one of those in Malaya and a Daimler Dingo scout car. So I was selected with Rasmussen to drive this ferret. Now, a ferret hasn't got any real windows in it. It's an armoured scout car. But at the front so you can see you can have it when you're under attack

37:30 and you look through a little aperture like that. It's bullet proof glass and you can hardly see a thing. You think you're Mister Magoo. When you leave the flap down, okay, you're in Sydney and you're not exposed to any danger – well from rifle fire anyway. So we drove it with the flap down. When we got to Scone the first night we stayed at the oval. The snow was eighteen inches around the oval fence. Well Rasmussen and I

38:00 were frozen solid from driving this scout car and they thought, we're going north so tomorrow night's going to be better. I was trying to con Rasmussen into taking the scout car the rest of the way and he's trying to con me. Well, we decided to halve it. We stayed at Guyra. I don't know if you've been to Guyra, but that's right up in the ranges as well and the snow was two foot deep around the oval where we stayed. Cold.

38:30 We eventually got to Wacol and there's a fella there called Rex Clark. Now Rex Clark was an ex-apprentice and a Portsea graduate. He and I got on like a house on fire. He said, "You're very fit," and I said, "Yeah I like to do cross country running." We were playing Aussie Rules – the only game of football you could get. He said, "I'll give you a couple of tests." So he got me to make a tennis court with just two boning rods with no dumpy level

39:00 or a Seattle light or anything like that. To build a dozen or so carports. There was Dumpy Kelly and myself, the two of us, and we had to prefabricate all these things and take them across and had one shot at it. So I passed all that. Then he said, “Okay, you’re going to go down to Ultimo Tech in Sydney. As a plumber. We want you to get your education in the building trades as best you can.” So I said, “Okay.” So I went down to Ultimo Tech

39:30 and we did a builder foreman’s course. Oh yeah, that’s pretty good. Anyway, got through to the bricklayers’ exam at the end of it. This instructor, a civilian bloke come up to me and he said, “Corporal Anderson, there’s a staff car there for you. You’ve got to go across to Moore Park Barracks. There’s a brigadier or a colonel Gin that wants to talk to you.” I said, “Okay. But I haven’t finished the exam.” “Yes you have lad. You’ve passed it.”

40:00 So down I went and I got to this colonel’s office and I’m in uniform and he said, “Is your name Anderson?” “Yes sir.” “How often do you spit polish those boots?” “Every day, sir.” And he said, “And the web belt, what do you do with that?” I said, “I spit polish that too.” “Heavens! Mm. It says here you’re super fit.” “Yes, sir.” “All right, sign this.” So I signed it. He said, “Don’t you want to know what you’re signing, lad?” I said, “You told me to sign it.” He said,

40:30 “You’re going to Portsea.” So I passed all the exams for Portsea and away to Portsea I went.

Tape 2

00:30 **You sign your piece of paper and you’re off to Portsea.**

Yes. We got to Spencer Street and my father – he was that proud – I’ll just go back a step. Dad was the secretary of the Bateman’s Bay sub-branch and he was with Legacy at Bateman’s Bay. He was a wonderful man. Anyway, he said, “Are you going to

01:00 take…” – I had a Holden ute because I thought I was going to be a plumber. I was going to get out of the army after my nine years was up. I had a brand new Holden ute. And he said, “Look are you going to leave the ute here with me?” I said, “No. I’m going to take it down to Portsea with me.” He said, “Oh you’re going to drive it down?” “Yes.” He said, “I think I should come with you.” Before I know where I am Stewart Elliot – the president of the RSL [Returned Services League], another great bloke, he’s coming with us. Well the back of the ute is full of beer actually and prawns

01:30 and lobsters and oysters. We used to stop every so often and have a beer and an oyster. We stayed at a hotel overnight just over the Victorian border and I can remember we stopped at Lakes Entrance just as the sun was coming up and had the final feed of oysters and he said, “Do you want a beer?” and I said, “No thanks. Better keep the old marbles sane.” So he got me to Spencer Street station on time. I got onto the bus

02:00 and I sat in the front seat because I wanted to see who was going to get on the bus. We were all in civilian clothes. Anyway this fellow called Brian Avery – now, Brian was our medic in Malaya with us in 2’s trip. He looked at me and I looked at him and he said, “Oh are you going as the plumber?” I said, “No. Are you going as the medic?” He said, “No. Don’t tell me we’re both going as cadets?” I said, “Yeah.” So we sat side by side. And he and I are still great mates. He lives up in Brisbane and I saw he

02:30 and his wife, Evelyn, not so long ago. Anyway we watch all these fellows get on the bus and the number of ex-apprentices in our class is just amazing. So I go back to the background that we were given – a. by our parents, and by those blokes who’d just come back from Korea. The grounding in our trade, but the soldiers they made of us. I’m very proud. It was worth the three years. It really was. Anyway we get to Portsea and it’s all run from the time you get there.

03:00 You don’t know who you are, who the other blokes is, you don’t know if they’ve got stooges in there or not. Some of the civilian fellows that have never been near the army, you can just about see them going to make a snide comment or something and you shake your head at them and you pick out the ones that look like they’re really in trouble and you try and help them. You’re thinking to yourself, is this a test? If I stumble now are they going to pick on me and single me out and say I can’t hack it?

03:30 If I help someone else and it pulls me back further? If I don’t help someone and they see me and they say that I should? So I thought, “Oh well do the right thing and you help your mates.” That’s what I did. Anyhow it wasn’t a test at all. But eventually we got all settled in. They put us into a two storey barrack block. The senior class there some of them – most of them were civilian intake fellows and there were a few of them –

04:00 one bloke, Bob Milligan, who got killed with 5 Battalion on their first trip to Vietnam – good bloke. He was a staff sergeant and he was my grandfather – they’ve got a father/son relationship there. I lived in the next room to Bob and he really looked after me. There’s other fellas that are put in charge of you, but you’re really in sections the same as the infantry runs itself.

04:30 You’ve got all sorts of military basic training. The Bren gun and all these weapons and things we’re already proficient in. Then they go on to other things like leadership and we had to do logic. If you’ve

ever struck logic – I could never work out why they taught us algebra at school, but if ever someone comes up to you and says you've got to learn logic, really ask yourself why. There's seventeen moods to the syllogism or of the syllogism and you've got to learn – there's Barbara,

05:00 Solara, Dariant, Variant, and it goes on to the seventeenth, but they're all words that are made up of vowels. So Barbara has got three 'a's in it. In logic the thing that is really spot on and makes sense is a sentence with a a a. So case a, case a, case a, so you get a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. And it's whoopee stuff and you can prove that horses are animals and quadrupeds are animals so therefore all horses are quadrupeds or which way, oh, anyway

05:30 I passed it, some of the guys didn't. But the education there was wonderful. For the twelve months that they had us plus the break in the middle they really turned out some pretty qualified fellows for what was ahead of us. For twelve months I thought they did a good job. And the staff there were supportive and wonderful. Some of the senior class guys were a bit –

06:00 this thing that bastardisation that they had at Duntroon [Royal Military College]? There was a fellow in our class who's dead now, Paddy O'Brien, and Paddy O'Brien was in a recent helicopter crash up north taking someone to hospital early in the morning and tangles into the wire or he ran out – I don't know. But Paddy was a good bloke. But he didn't make the grade at Duntroon for some reason and came to us and was in our senior class. And he might have given them the idea

06:30 that you've got to treat these fellows like whacko and they used to get us up at four in the morning and sit on the toilet seat to make them warm. Make the toilet seat warm for the senior class. And had us doing rifle drill naked with a web belt and a bayonet lying on the cold lino floor and all this. And waving at ships and all this sort of stuff. Well the ex-apprentices – these guys hadn't come into contact with ex-apprentices before and we told them that wasn't the right way to go

07:00 about it and some of the arguments went a bit far. I was paraded before the CO, Colonel Coleman, and I thought I might have been turfed out. But anyway sanity usually prevails, no justice. So I stayed and I graduated. And my father and this Stuart Elliot came down with their – well what a night. There was a Brigadier Simpson who

07:30 handed out our graduation certificates and everything and Brigadier Simpson was in the Western Desert with my father in the same battalion. Dad was calling him Colonel Simpson and he said, "I've had a few more promotions since then Anderson." It was just gorgeous.

Can you just explain to us how Portsea is different to Duntroon?

Yeah. Duntroon is an annexe of the Australian National University – ANU.

08:00 And they have their own academic staff. They have their own military staff the same as Portsea had. It's a college, not a school. They graduate with a degree and they can get a degree in the arts of engineering and they do four years. So they need the leaving certificate to go in there. At Portsea

08:30 you didn't need the leaving certificate to go in provided that on your graduation, to make you a substantive lieutenant you qualified in the army promotional leaving. That's science, English, maths and logic. The Duntroon fellows come out on graduation full lieutenants with two pips where we had only one. I think. They reckon that's the most dangerous thing in the

09:00 army – a second lieutenant with a map. But still. To compare the two, the product at the end, in infantry there's not much difference. All good guys all trying to do the right thing. I think the Duntroon graduate has a bigger impression of himself with the field marshal baton in the bottom of the kitbag than the more realistic Portsea bloke. But

09:30 a lot of the Portsea fellas made general and full colonel and brigadier so we're pretty proud of them. It's just the academic stuff really that's the difference. When you get to a battalion – I'll just go back a bit. I'd spent nine years all up. With the army apprentices' school three years, and then

10:00 engineers for over six. So I had to sign on again. I wanted to go back to engineers. One thing I omitted to tell you – the schooling in the army goes on and on. If you look like you can be promoted or you can be promotion material the army really looks after you. They sent me to a course in Kluang in Malaya just above Singapore in Johor

10:30 and it was a field engineering course. It takes a long time to do. When you finish that you qualify for your subjects for sergeant. Anyway, I'd done that course. When I got to Portsea, by the time I graduated I'd spent a year at Portsea, this builder foreman's course I was telling you about and not so long before I come home this course at Kluang. So I was like a school kid waiting for the last bell.

11:00 They said, "Oh you're going to engineers." I said, "That's fine." "But you've got to do the long course at the School of Military Engineering." I said, "Come on troops. I've just done that." "Oh no, you've got to do it." I said, "No. I'll go to infantry." So I went to infantry. Because Dad was infantry. Well my father and his brother Les and Uncle Arthur – all the stories they told me about Tobruk and El Alamein not to me directly but

11:30 at my grandmother's place on a Sunday night and they used to get beer and put it from the schooner glass and they'd siphon it into a quartz bottle and then take it home and have it Sunday night at

Grandma's and then get around this map at Tobruk and I used to listen on the periphery of the table. It just fascinated me. So I thought, infantry's what I really want. And I liked it in Malaya when we had been on patrol and things like that. So I went to 1 Battalion. So did Brian Avery, this other mate of mine.

12:00 And a fella called Bill Giles who lives up in Queensland and he and I are still good mates. I went to D Company at the far end. They called us the Tarax Rangers – I don't know what, they found some Tarax cans outside the front gate or something and they thought we didn't drink beer. But the guys in 1 RAR in those days it was

12:30 pentropic and everything was five like the pentagon and the battalion was thirteen hundred and eight soldiers. There were a lot of officers. In excess of forty. I know that's a lot of people. And they were all great blokes, every one of them. There's commanding officers were just brilliant fellows.

13:00 All the staff officers you just look at them in awe and just wonder if ever you'd be that confident and capable…Anything you wanted to know you could go to any one of them and ask them a question, they'd give you a straight honest answer. If they didn't know they'd know who to send you to. The soldiers themselves – I reckon today in Peter Cosgrove's army he'd be lucky to find a rifle platoon with twenty-eight fellas in it. My first

13:30 rifle platoon was 13 platoon, D Company, 1 RAR and I had sixty-five, I think it was, soldiers at one stage. Just amazing. Just brilliant days. But the army had no money and to do the training you had to use your initiative and do things yourself with what you had. You hear people complaining today about rations and

14:00 the money they get and the way they live. Just … Anyway, again I'm on twenty-eight pound a fortnight as a second lieutenant. To take place of the Caribou aircraft we used to call the Studebaker trucks Studee Boos and you sit in the back of the Studebaker truck and the soldiers pretending they're airplane engine, vroom vroom. And the helicopters are UH1B

14:30 model Iroquois helicopters that the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] had then. And we didn't have enough and we didn't have the fuel and we didn't have this and we didn't have that. So they got the department of housing and works to come out and build us little platforms. You'd swear it was a park bench. That's all it was, this bench. The soldiers – because they're great guys. Sense of humour! They'd sit in these things and bounce up ad down and go, wokka wokka. You're supposed to be flying around in the helicopter. Three blokes'd get out on the port side and fall out the starboard side

15:00 and take three paces and down and look around. Wait till the lift goes off, stand up and run to a marker panel and all that stuff. They reckon – I don't know if it's true or not – the Centurion tanks were that low on mileage they weren't allowed to turn the odometers over, but they used to reverse them everywhere. I don't know whether that's true or not. But the food. When you went away on an exercise you had tinned equivalent. And that was the bully beef that our father's were given in –

15:30 I hope it was in New Guinea, not Tobruk – it was pretty medieval stuff. And big tins, and I mean big tins, of carrots, peas – they were all right – potatoes, beans and the bakers used to make bread rolls and they'd drop them from underneath the wings of the Pilatis Porter aircraft. Just like a free drop in an onion sack or something like that. There'd be bread rolls all through

16:00 the bush. Water was always a problem. Heat exhaustion in the summer was a problem. Snake bite was a worry. Didn't happen very often though. But heat exhaustion was the hardest thing. We did one major exercise before we went to Vietnam called Nutcracker and we had to meet at a place called Three Way and we'd been without water

16:30 for a couple of days and some of my soldiers were looking a bit bad. I had a sergeant called Peter Shilston who's dead now, god love him – Peter and I had half a water bottle between the two of us. We used to drink the juice from the peas or the potatoes but we'd try and give the soldiers what was best and we'd take what was left. And you'd shave

17:00 in the potato juice. And the last day came and we got up the top of this hill and I sat the platoon down and we were waiting for water to come and they said it wouldn't be long. And Sergeant Shilston and I had made great plans for this half mug of water. What we were going to do with it. We decided on black tea, no sugar. And what we were going to do was make the tea and then let it cool

17:30 so we could just sort of sip it like gentlemen. And take a turn. We had this all down. Well we're almost there, the ritual's complete, the tea's made and it's just about cool enough to drink and along comes this mate of mine, Bill Giles with B Company. "Ando, you bastards have got water." Bill was a big bloke. And he swoops down and he picks the mug up and glug glug down like that and he saw the light in Shilston's eyes and he thought, I'm dead. He said,

18:00 "Oh Ando, don't tell me you haven't got water." Incredible. Poor Bill. He go off up the road. But eventually the water came. Gee they hard days.

We've heard some stories about how some people thought that was toughening guys up by not giving them water. Do you know what the circumstances were behind that?

No. Water discipline was always taught and it stems from the First World War and it was practised in the

18:30 Second World War. Dad was telling me they used to get a boot tin lid. You know, the Kiwi boot polish? A boot tin lid of water a day. You had to not cook with it, but what did he say? You had to clean your teeth and shave with it and the other water you could drink. But I know they had hardly any water at all during the siege. But we were issued with two water bottles. Never any more. Then they brought

19:00 a great stack of plastic five gallon jerry cans. They're pretty heavy when you pick them up full. But we were taught not to waste water and we were taught to be able to survive on the two water bottles a day. And we were taught not to drink water too fast. They gave us salt tablets for the dehydration. In the Malayan jungle you could always find surface water so

19:30 it never worried us there. In Vietnam, different story. In the dry season it's just like Darwin and the surface water disappears completely in their summer. There's just none. And I'll come back to it later when I talk about 8 Battalion but we carried enough water to last us five days and that's heavy man. And just in case I forget later on, but I weighed myself at the Kapyong chopper pad when I was taking the resupply back out to D Company 8 RAR.

20:00 One of the quartermaster's staff was there weighing something and I said, "Just give me an idea what my pack weighs." I took my gear, basic webbing and everything off, weighted it with my rifle and he said, "That's ten stone." I said, "You made a mistake." "No. It's ten stone." That's with the water and everything. So I pulled that off and jumped on myself and I was ten and a half stone.

20:30 No wonder we felt – anyway we go back to where we – all of the exercises that we did we had no idea that we were going to go to Vietnam at this stage. And then the battalion was told and we went down to Canberra. They'd had an Anzac Day parade and they'd opened something. I forget whether it was a new part of the War Memorial

21:00 or something like that, but it was some big occasion. That was 1965. So Anzac Day's 25th April as you know so that was –

Was that the fiftieth anniversary one?

I just can't – I think they'd opened something. I might be able to find a document there later, but all I can remember is 1965. Anyway we came back from that

21:30 and I remember one afternoon I'd left D Company and they made me an assistant adjutant. This Brian Avery, he was the assistant adjutant before me. We worked for a guy called Wingie Waugh. Major John Waugh, who is dead now. Gorgeous bloke. He later took 5 Battalion

22:00 and Colonel Townsend who was a major then had support company and he took 6 battalion – that Long Tan battle, he was the CO for that. Another fabulous man. A fellow called Lou Brumfield, he lives just across the lake here from me, Lou Brumfield was our CO. John Waugh told me later, he said, "We were arguing whether you were going to be the assistant adjutant with John Waugh in 5 Battalion or stay in 1 Battalion as your sole pioneer

22:30 platoon commander with Lou Brumfield." Everything about you in the army is written in a book, your army book. He said, "We saw all your" – the marks that I got in the field engineer course – hundred percent in demolitions and hundred percent in bridging, all that, so that sealed my fate and I stayed with the assault pioneer platoon. But I can remember the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] marching us down as a battalion into the theatre.

23:00 The battalion must have known – like the CO and the John S S Clarke and a few others had known. Because John Healey who's dead now too – another gorgeous bloke – his wife, June, I had lunch with her in Adelaide last year and she looks after War Widows' Guild and she had a job at the War Memorial too. But John Healey invited us round

23:30 to his place and he was showing slides, 35mm slides of Vietnam because he and Adrian Clunies-Ross and a few others had been up to Vietnam with a training team and they'd just come back. Of course, when you're a young bloke like that in an infantry battalion you're that tired all day from running around that when you go to someone's place and you're not too sure what it's all about and you're watching these 35mm slides on Vietnam, a place that you didn't think that you'd ever go to because you were too junior –

24:00 they were only taking captains then – I went to sleep. And Johnny Clarke's trying to wake me up all the time. Sonia's going, "You're rude." I should have twigged then that there was something on. Anyway we went to the theatre and all these fellows from the intelligence school are prancing around. And then this bloke, an Australian bloke, comes racing up dressed in black pyjamas and all this sort of stuff and he's going to kill us all and he's going to do this and he's

24:30 going to do that. So they gave us a great schpiel about how we were all going to get killed in Vietnam and they'd just told us then that we'd be going and what we had to be careful of and what we couldn't do and what we had to do and we didn't have a chance and all this sort of stuff. When they went out the RSM, old Macca McKay, he was a Second World War soldier and what a soldier, one of the most wonderful men I've ever met in my life, he stood up in front of the battalion and he said, "Well you've heard all this.

25:00 All I can say is, we're professional soldiers and these blokes are all farmers. So don't you worry about it. We'll be right." The whole battalion just marched out of the theatre. Anyway I got home that night and our wives already knew. I'll tell you something that I don't really want to tell you, but I will. And people can take this however they like, I don't really care. But it's the truth.

25:30 We lived in Hammondville and I told you I took over a married quarter from Claude Duckett. Bradey Avenue, Hammondville. It backed on to the Heathcote Road, our house. We had a lieutenant colonel from ordnance corps called Harry Donby who lived next door to us and Ron Duci, the adjutant of 1 RAR lived on the other side of me. Across the road, the people who lived there I didn't know. Because you leave when it's dark and you get home after dark.

26:00 And Sonia at this time, my wife, was a legal stenographer with a firm of solicitors in Sydney in Martin Place. She used to get into Liverpool somehow – I don't know, a bus I suppose – and get the train into Sydney and back each day. I don't know how I'm going to handle this but I'll do the best I can. When we actually left

26:30 before I moved away from Holsworthy one of the colonels, he had 9 Battalion, and he'd vacated his married quarters in Light Horse Parade and I'd moved into there. Sonia moved in. But the bulk of the people lived in Hammondville, the married quarters.

27:00 I went away on 8th May and I went Qantas with a fellow called Ian Guild, the intelligence officer from 1. There were about nine of us from 1 Battalion but the draft was an actual 707 load or – no it wasn't. There would have been about forty in the draft I suppose.

27:30 There was a fellow I think his name was Phil Pritchard, I'm pretty sure it was him, a captain from service corps that looked after the other fellows. So my main job was the nine Australians from 1 Battalion. I'll get back to what I'm talking about in a second but we went out in civilian clothes early in the morning and all our army stuff was in the steel trunks. Our weapons were in the steel trunk. We couldn't take much equipment with us at all. The bulk of the battalion

28:00 went on the HMAS Sydney. The other stores that we needed went on the Sydney. We got to Manila that afternoon and I had the job of allocating rooms to my fellows. Anyway I'd done what I had to do and the manager said, "We've no rooms left."

28:30 I said, "Oh well there's Lieutenant Guild and myself. There's two rooms you need. Where do you sleep?" And he got what I meant and he said, "All right, all I've got left is the bridal suite." So that'll do. So Guild and I took the bridal suite. Okay. Next day we arrived in Vietnam. Now while we're doing that. The time was identical.

29:00 When the soldiers arrived in the later draft some come up by plane and some come up on the Sydney they were telling us that the people in the civilian population around were knocking on the doors propositioning our wives. The women said it was just terrible what was going on. And all night this just went on and on.

29:30 Now I wasn't there so I don't know. I was only told. So in the army it's called hearsay evidence. But if Australians had to go to war in future I'd just beg everyone to just consider what goes on in the mind of a soldier that's a long way away from home. Anyway the second part of our trip from Manila to Ton San Nhut in Saigon was on a Pan Am flight.

30:00 I was still a pretty young man at this stage. Twenty-six. A second lieutenant and not really confident. And got in the Pan Am flight and you expect to see a 707 done up like a Qantas 707 which we just drove off. But it was devoid of anything except seats. No cover around the fuselage or anything. No hostesses. No shoe boxes with food. Nothing. We just hoped there was a couple of pilots up the front.

30:30 When it went into land at Ton San Nhut they came from thirty-three thousand feet virtually straight down. You'd think you were in a kamikaze flight. Anyway we landed the thing and we all got out at the run and just took all of our luggage out of the cargo hold at the bottom and put us into helicopter hangars. Just round Nissen huts with sandbag walls. We changed into our

31:00 green pants, green shirt, black boots and all that sort of stuff. Loaded our weapons, put our field equipment on and then 173 Airborne Brigade sent the helicopters out to meet us. At this stage we had Major Sharp and Major John Essex Clark, OC Adam Company and OC support company who went up in the reconnaissance party before us. 173 airborne was situated out at a place called Bien Hoa and

31:30 Bien Hoa isn't that far from Saigon. About half an hour by car I suppose. It might be a bit more. It's on a river and the Vietnamese word for river is song. The Song Don Ni it's called. And on the northern side of the river lay war zone D. War zone D was our initiation into the Vietnam War. Around 28th May I think, May and early June, as the battalion arrived

32:00 we dug in and John Essex Clark had done a marvellous job. He'd actually argued where we were to be located. Our primary role was to occupy the reverse slope of a hill. It was like a real long ridge and the hill going one side down to the river to the north and our side to the south down to the Bien Hoa airstrip. And that was occupied by the

32:30 American and ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] air force. The Americans, the brigade, they wanted us to occupy some rubber. That's not fun, to live in rubber. And John battled on and he won. We got into a place where it was rubber tree stumps about half a metre high. We did the

33:00 best we could and dug in there and John's a very clever man and he'd done his staff college in England and he came out from Rhodesian army. He was born in Australia though. John had the barbed wire run so that it came in Vs. We sited the machine guns so they could interlace the fire either way – mutually support each other with no mucking around. You didn't have to go moving things.

33:30 It was quite clever. When the battalion had arrived – this is where Lou Brumfield came into his own – he argued with the brigadier, the Yank, that we needed fourteen days to acclimatise. He thought that was too long and his blokes didn't do that, but they were in Okinawa where they'd come from. Anyway we won. We had our fourteen days and we went and had grenade practices and all this type of stuff and test fired weapons and got to try and learn

34:00 the American ways of doing voice procedure on the radios and how their networked and all this type of stuff. And we did a table patrol of the tactical area we were given to the front. And another thing I like about going to wars with Australians is we really do better on our own. We don't like to share areas with anyone else. Because other people have got different ideas like who does the laundry. Well, you don't do the laundry.

34:30 You get a contractor way outside to do the laundry, you don't bring someone in. Who does this and who does that? No one comes into your camp. And if ever you get the chance to see a movie called The Hamburger Hill about the 101st Airborne who were also there at that same time as us, this'll show you why. Because they let people come in and clean their tents and all this sort of stuff and spit polish their boots. They wonder why Charlie's – sorry the Viet Cong – are getting all the information on them. It just doesn't pay.

35:00 But the Australians are very good at that. Keep to yourself and do your own thing as best you can. We did the table patrol as I said and there were a couple of trees that worried us because they had the pioneers. John Essex Clark got me to blow them down. There was an underground hospital found just out to the front of us. We got in there and we blew that up.

35:30 I remember writing to Sonia and saying "I don't know what all the fuss is about here." They'd got in and they'd mortared the air base. The Viet Cong. I said, "It just seems to me that we could be home by Christmas." Then it happened. The North Vietnamese came into it. They were supported by the Chinese.

36:00 It was a different ballgame all together. They used to – I don't want to say too much about the first trip to Vietnam because I got sick and came home. I was only there till the end of September. I just can't remember. But in the early days it's worth saying the contrasts between fighting communist terrorists with the Brits in Malaya

36:30 in the fifties as opposed to fighting the CTs and the North Vietnamese army with the Americans in South Vietnam in sixty-five. The contrast. That's all I want to mention. Because we were an airborne brigade everything was done virtually by helicopter or parachute. Very little by road or walkies. We get up

37:00 early in the morning. We'd had our briefing the day before. There'd bring big semi trailers up. They'd load us onto the back of the semi trailers and they'd take us to a place down at Bien Hoa airport called the Snake Pit. We'd get off the semi trailers and they'd form us up in chalks of five because they were Bravo model helicopters. They only took three on the bench seat because we had our packs on and one would sit

37:30 on the portside with his feet over the sill, on the floor with your feet on the skids if you could touch the skids. And a fellow behind you on the starboard side. They had door gunners and they had single M60s that used to point down and two pilots. There were sometimes 99 slick helicopters in one lift.

38:00 To an Australian who came from a concrete park bench with soldiers going, "Wokka wokka," this was pretty big stuff. You'd see these things like tadpoles flying through the sky to come in. The Yank on the ground would signal to where all the choppers were to line up and they'd line up and the rotors were still going. He'd put the thumb up and you'd all run in.

38:30 The helicopters take off in lifts of nine. There were three distinct groups in this nine and for every nine there'd be three razorbacks or hogs and they were the same model helicopters, but they were armoured. And they had rockets and mini guns. The first time – and you can see the looks on the soldiers' faces

39:00 - excitement, bewilderment, awe, some bemused completely and some not even interested, but that's about the spectrum that it went across that I know. The signal's given and they go up like this, just lift off the ground and away you go. Now, I used to always sit on the floor on the starboard

39:30 side and you'd fly at about eight or nine thousand feet, but it's so that the CTs couldn't fire up at you with small arms fire. You'd get to the DZ [Drop Zone] and I was always fortunate because they had the pioneers, the rifle companies would always go in first so if there's any drama it's all over by the time I got there anyway. The come in a lift of nine

40:00 and it goes nose, tail, nose and lift off. They don't stop because they could be fired at from the flanks. You'd run three paces and go down on the ground and when the choppers had cleared someone would be designated to look up and they'd yell out "Clear" and you'd all stand up and someone'd put a marker panel to where you were to go to. So you were designated a colour yellow or red. You'd run to that and you'd get inside the jungle and you'd wait. Marry yourselves all up

40:30 and you'd continue on. We used to do search and destroy operations. That meant that you'd plod around – my job was to protect battalion headquarters and the mortar platoon. Luckily we didn't have to walk all that far but we had to carry two mortar rounds and they're pretty heavy with the five days rations and stuff.

Tape 3

00:30 **The wives already knew that you were going to Vietnam?**

Yeah. We found out before in the afternoon. I forget what day it was. When we got home – it was only walking distance really from Holsworthy camp – and we thought, how are we going to tell our wives? They already knew. It just went like wildfire. Either someone in the army had said something,

01:00 but I think it came either through the TV networks or the radio because the newspapers had it. So I suppose when the government made the announcement they didn't take into account how our wives'd feel. I don't know how it happened. But they definitely knew before we got home. Not nice. With the assault

01:30 pioneer platoon in one area. Battalions are traditionally the same in the Australian army and the roles of each of the rifle companies are the same or similar. It's just as technology changes and the necessity of the operations that have to go that things change and you'll find that some traditional infantry battalions become mechanised and some have airborne – parachute like 3 Battalion. But in our day

02:00 the assault pioneer was part of support company and John Essex Clark commanded support company in 1 RAR and I was given specific tasks, but as I said, I'd been the assistant adjutant before and in 13 platoon before that so I didn't have much of a chance to marry myself up with the actual assault pioneer platoon before we went away. Having said that, the guys that had had that platoon before –

02:30 don't know what sort of level experience they'd had – but in the main the soldiers themselves, the assault pioneer platoon of 1 RAR were outstanding fellows. They without question did exactly as they were told when they were told willingly. They worked like navvies. One of the tasks was to build the or to dig in the main command post where Lou

03:00 Brumfield was to work. There's two ways to look at this. What I'm about to say is, normal training for war and when war happens and when you inculcate something into a system or the mind of an individual – the platoon commander or the soldier – they accept that what they've been taught and practised and trained to do is what they're going to do when they reach that

03:30 theatre of war. All of the tasks such as barbed wire fences, the command posts, the CO's bunker, the intelligence corps hole in the ground, the mortar platoon, the fire co-ordinating centre, the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], all those things have to be dug in and it all

04:00 depends on the threat. But we were always taught to go for eighteen inches at least of overhead protection. That's not cover from view or cover from rain, that's protection from and what I estimated would be similar to a three inch mortar. So its ground penetration wouldn't be so great. So I thought that the eighteen inches of overhead cover would suffice. Now to provide that you've got to dig a pretty big hole.

04:30 To dig those big holes you've got to allow for the rain, the wet season in Vietnam. As I said, the two seasons, the dry and the wet, are similar to Darwin. So when it rains it rains. Where the water goes, it usually comes down and will find its own level. So what you've got to hope is that level's not going to be at the base of the command post. Otherwise you're going to be pretty unpopular fellow with the people that have to work in there. So I had to allow for a sump. So I allowed an extra

05:00 two metres almost for the hole to be tapered down so we could put a pump in there eventually to pump it out. To run away to another sump pit. So they wouldn't be disturbed inside I had to pump the water away to get it down the hill. Unfortunately we weren't on flat ground. We were on a slope. To achieve this in the time that we were given – remember we had to go out on these table patrols and we were going into war zone D

05:30 I split the platoon up in to three sections and made them do three eight hour shifts so we were working twenty-four hours a day. When you can't show any light, that's pretty hard to do. The diggers didn't complain. Didn't have a great array of tools, but luckily for us the soil was pretty easy to dig in. To find all of the

06:00 timber to rivet the earthworks themselves to stop the sides from falling in – when a shell impacts on the

ground, if it goes on top of the command post, that's one thing. But if it goes onto the side and you haven't allowed for that it can blow the side wall in, and occasion damage – maybe suffocation – to the occupants inside. So I went to a lot of trouble to bevel or to splay the sides of the command post and I got the soldiers to fill up sand bags

06:30 and we used that as an extra buffer. And I was going to line that with timber. Now somehow the Jeparit was a ship that came up from Sydney with all our air supply stores on it. I think it had mail at some stage. But all of the war stores that we needed to survive up there. Anyway all the timber that John Essex Clark and I had worked out that we'd need, that I'd ordered, didn't arrive.

07:00 So whether it was lost in Sydney or lost when the Jeparit landed in Saigon or on a truck, I just don't know where it went. The timber in South East Asia generally is pretty good. But in Vietnam for some reason the timber that I could get that was mill timber the biggest I could get was four by four and it was a soft wood. It had no strength at all in it. You could just about bend it four inches by four inches.

07:30 So what I had to do was get my carpenter, Corporal Billy Clifton, to keep the lengths as long as he possibly could for strength and we'd put three or four of these four by fours together and make it as big as we possibly could and for strength we'd nail them through and then put wire – just ordinary cargo wire – around them and just hope that was strong enough.

08:00 We got some pierced steel plank which is used in wet weather areas on roads so that the traffic can get across it. This was aluminium though. Pierced aluminium plank. And it was strong enough. So I used that for the roof. I was told after I'd come home. I come home sick. That

08:30 the colonel, Lou Bunfield, had got someone with a bulldozer to drive over this thing, trying to crush it all into the ground, but it stayed on. But the soldiers that worked in there – it was never my intention and the design of it – it was never intended for them to work in there fulltime. The place that I'd picked that was made available to me was an old artillery thing that the Vietnamese had. It's an artillery site. You could see the spot where they had the gun and some ammunition bays. So I just

09:00 enlarged them. But I have the vision that they'd put a tent up and work in the tent and if they were mortared they could go down inside. But for some reason they decided they'd work in there. And of course it's hot. Very hot. So they'd put in ammunition boxes and welded them end to end to make shafts for air to come through. Now, eventually my next step if I had have stayed there was to try and organise an air conditioner and run it.

09:30 Or even have to design it myself and pump the stale air out and the fresh air in and have some sort of a fan or have a punkah. You know, the Indians have a punkah wallah with the punkah going? Anyway I wasn't there long enough. It didn't eventuate. But those soldiers did all of that work plus watermanship. They could do zodiacs. You know, those little rubber duckies that you see now. They could make rafts.

10:00 They could do repelling from Iroquois helicopters and we'd trained in Australia just before we went away to actually repel from the helicopters just as you see the SAS [Special Air Service] doing now one at a time down one rope and we could cut the jungle down on a ridge line or a spur line and make access for helicopters to come in and land and take off. They were good at demolitions and the basic bridging. They could use flame throwers.

10:30 Of course, they were just general infantrymen as well. So they were quite clever fellas. All of them very intelligent. You only had to say something to them once and they understood. I don't really think that we had much of a

11:00 chance to do everything that we were trained for. We used the flamethrowers to burn down the high grass in the barbed wire so you could see through it from time to time. And Bill Giles told me that Lance Corporal Jordan went with him doing bunkers later on after I'd come home with the flame throwers. But normally we just went out, carried the two mortar rounds for the mortar platoon in our pack and guarded battalion headquarters

11:30 and the mortar platoon. Looked after them. One day I passed out and it could have been the result of a few things, but I don't know to this day what it was, but I just passed out. And I went down and saw the doctor at Bien Hoa from 1 Battalion and he put me in a jeep

12:00 and they sent me to a hospital in Saigon and I stayed there for a while. Then they were going to send me across to Clark Airfield, the big hospital there at the big air base that the Yanks had until the volcano went off. And they sent me down to Butterworth. I stayed in hospital there for a while. Then they sent me down to Singapore and they gave me all these tests and everything and it was decided that it was no good

12:30 sending me back to Vietnam and I needed diet and all this sort of stuff because I couldn't control my stomach. So I came home and they made me adjutant of a CMF battalion. 3 Battalion Royal New South Wales regiment. The CO there is Owen Edwards, a solicitor from Moss Vale. Lovely fellow. And the 2IC was John Joseph Anthony Kelly. He's also a solicitor and later he ended up as a justice on the high

13:00 court in Canberra. They used to call themselves the bush lawyers. I stayed with them for two years and one day they called me into the director of infantry and they said, "You're fit again," and I said, "Yes." I went on a special diet and I couldn't smoke or drink for the two years. I think that's the way it went.

And no sport. “Yes. I’m medically fit.” They said, “All right. You’re going to Malaya

13:30 with 8 Battalion .” So they sent me up on a mortar course at the school of military engineering and that lasted for about a month I guess. And Mal Peck who was the mortar officer in 1 RAR with us, he was the chief instructor on the mortar course. And of course, Brian Avery, my mate – we always seemed to end up together, Brian and I. We did this mortar course. Anyway I passed that and they sent Sonia and I

14:00 and elder son, Stephen, to Malaya via Singapore. One of the 1 RAR fellas, John MacNamara, who lives down here at Tweed Heads, he met us at Singapore Airport and they had a motor race like the one they have here, the car races. The Grand Prix or something like that they called it. Of course all the hotel accommodation had been booked out. They sent us to an unsavoury part of Singapore and Lee Kwan Yew

14:30 as I said had done a marvellous job, but hadn’t quite finished on this one. Sonia wasn’t very impressed with this place. Nor was my son, Stephen. Anyway we went to a very average hotel room and it was terribly hot and the air conditioner wouldn’t work. Sonia insisted on having the door and the window open to let some air through and there was a band upstairs who kept playing. And the band went all night. Next morning we went to

15:00 Malacca. We got to Malacca and Adrian Clunies-Ross met us. Adrian had been my last company commander when I had 13 Platoon D company 1 RAR. He’d been on the training team on Vietnam before and he was OC support company of 8 Battalion and he said I’d be their mortar platoon commander and we lived next door to each other at a place called –

15:30 no, I can’t remember. But it was just out of the garrison area. They had a containment at Bukit Terendak. Bukit is ‘hill’. Don’t know what ‘Terendak’ means, but Bukit Terendak. The English had started that off when we were there before in ’57 so it would have been in 1959 when they built it. It was quite well done. All the training areas were good and adequate and big sports fields and the soldiers were comfortable in nice barrack blocks. The parade

16:00 grounds were good and sealed. They had a separate officer sergeant’s mess with its own swimming pool. The lawns were kept by Indian women who swung like a scythe. They’d swing them round like that to cut all the grass. Major project. I don’t know how they did it. They seemed to start at one end and then finish and then go back and start again. We had a very happy life there. From

16:30 1968 to ’69. Then we came home. The battalion was sent back and we were told we were going to replace 9 Battalion in the – General Peter Cosgrove, he was in the rear party of 9 and I was in the advance party of 8 and again I was lucky. I was sent up in a Qantas 707 to Ton San Nhut direct. That was a good, uneventful trip.

17:00 When we arrived they put us into 9 Battalion lines and there’d been some terrible incident the night we arrived. I can remember that they tried to marry us up into our company areas. So D Company 9 had the advance party from 8 RAR D company and so on. One of the lieutenants

17:30 from 9 RAR had a kerfuffle, an argument with one of his soldiers. The soldier had put a grenade in his mosquito net and when they’d gone to bed – all the tents are sandbagged up to about a metre high – all I can remember is this bang and the screams. The grenade had killed this young officer. Our fellow from D company was his first night – only a second lieutenant, first time away.

18:00 As I recall Peter Cosgrove wasn’t very far away from all that. The next day we went out and did air reconnaissance with the company commanders. I was the intelligence officer at this stage. The COs, a fellow called Keith O’Neill, K.J. O’Neill, and another good fellow from 1 RAR and he was called the deputy assistant

18:30 quartermaster general and that was in the time before that I told you about 1 RAR and the problems we’d had getting rations and water and the bread rolls and all this sort of stuff. He was the guy that was responsible for that. Colonel O’Neill had a nickname of Peggy actually. None of us ever called him that though. But Peggy was very keen on intelligence and I was more G man.

19:00 In Malaya they’d made me like the operations officer and I used to run the command post and everything for 8 Battalion all the time we were in Malaya. I was a bit disappointed at first when we landed at Brisbane and he told me I was going to be the intelligence officer and I said to Sonia, “This isn’t going to be good. You’ve got, a. I’ve never been trained that way,” and I didn’t really – because in the battalions in my time all these intelligence officers were intelligence corps. And

19:30 they’d be farmed out to an infantry battalion as soon as they’d graduated from Duntroon or Portsea. They’d come in as a platoon commander at first so they could learn all about what the army was about and get firsthand knowledge of soldiers and leadership and tactics and then later on they’d go back and do their corps training at Woodside where the School of Infantry was and then they’d come back to us as a captain. And that’s what we’d enjoyed when we were with 1 RAR Anyway

20:00 Sonia lived at Bronte – no, Maroubra, near her mother and father. And I was at Enoggera up here in Brisbane. That was pretty daunting for Sonia there. She got a baby called Stuart, the youngest one, and Stephen. But she had her mother and father to support her and her brother so it worked out pretty well that way. But it was still pretty hard.

20:30 Anyway Peggy O'Neill had taught me to get information from wherever you could, even the most unlikely place, and to always question everything. He sent me to Woodside to do the intelligence school, which I did. And the intelligence section that I had were very good. The sergeant – the sergeants

21:00 in an infantry battalion are the backbone of it. I don't care what anyone says. Those guys have been around for a long while. They know their job back to front and it doesn't matter how long they've been doing it. They do everything they can to learn it. They always act as a pillar or a prop for their platoon commander, the actual incumbent of that whether the IO [Intelligence Officer] or what it be. I've got nothing but praise for those fellows. They've never ever let me down. They've always been good.

21:30 I used to leave Tony Jucha, my 2IC, who's now living in Brisbane – I see him quite often. He's in Legacy as well. He's the president of Legacy in Brisbane and I'm the president of Legacy here on the Gold Coast. So we see each other a bit. Tony and the sergeant and the section itself would do all the day to day stuff in preparation of background information for the CO's orders.

22:00 Everything that was vital that we needed right down to temperatures and rainfall and what was expected, the weather patterns and this sort of stuff, the soil. I'd go out to all of the neighbouring units, the SAS, the engineers, the air force, whoever I could talk to and we were very keen on finding out the habits of the units – so the enemy units, who they were, what they did, the way they acted, their response to

22:30 contact. When you fired on them, what did they do? Their habits of laying mines. Any messages that they used to leave for each other like small animal tracks, where they used to like to fight from, what their communications were like, the way they would dress, the types of weapons they had, the effective fire power that they could bring to bear on us from indirect fire or direct. Whether they dragged their bodies away after a fight.

23:00 Where they got the re-supply from, which villages, how long they could sustain themselves from where they were, how they got water in the dry season. When they'd lay mines – and whenever anyone'd contact a mine, armoured personnel or anti tank, we'd record it with little dots on our map and that would signify to us that's where the mines were. And we'd

23:30 instil into our rifle company commanders that's where they had to be very careful. And the platoon commanders would take note of it and every soldier was shown that map so that everybody knew where the recent mine incidents had been. All that information really paid off and Colonel O'Neill has to be thanked for that. I'm sure the battalion would have lost a lot more if it hadn't have been for his eagerness to get this sort of quality of intelligence information.

24:00 There was a fellow called Rick Haynes who was 2IC of D company with Mal Peck and Mal was the fellow who was with us in 1 battalion before and the mortar platoon course I did. And Mal was the OC of D company. It was decided I'd do six months as the IO and then Rick and I would swap. I don't know who did it, but that's what happened. Anyway I went as 2IC of D company.

24:30 When you're the 2IC of a rifle company you understudy the company commander and sometimes that when you're doing the same sort of operations, ambushing by day and hiding by night, or the other way round, there's not a lot for you to do. You just arrange and make sure the resupply gets there and all this sort of stuff. But Colonel O'Neill through his own design or whether he was ordered by

25:00 the brigadier, the captains John Maguire, myself and a few others, we were sent away as liaison officers. I got one job with the 48th ARVN regiment up at Blackhorse that I told you about. It used to belong to the air cavalry and the United States Army. That was the first

25:30 real job I got to go away for a long time. I think I might have been still the IO at this stage. It was Christmas '69, so I was. The CO of the 48th ARVN Regiment was a fellow called Tran Ban Nhut. A very private fellow.

26:00 Very hard to talk to because his English was limited and my Vietnamese wasn't that flash. But I never let on that I could speak as much of it as I could – or understand as much of it as I could. He had a 2IC that was a major who was a very nice fellow but couldn't speak much English at all. The fellow that ran his command post – they call it TOC, the tactical operation centre – was a fellow called Tui Tap. Tui is a Vietnamese second lieutenant.

26:30 He was a married fellow, very likeable. His English was pretty good. He had a sergeant working for him called Choong Si – that's sergeant – Choong Si Zoong. He was also married. Good English, likeable, easy to get on with. Tui Tap and Choong Si Zoong taught me how to get on with the colonel.

27:00 I'd followed what they said and in the end the colonel and I had a quite a good relationship. He gave me whatever I wanted in the tactical operations centre. That sounds grandiose and it isn't when you talk about the scale of what I wanted. Colonel O'Neill sent me up there for one reason. That whenever infantry fight in jungle they always like to have a buffer of a thousand metres –

27:30 a kilometre – all around them. So if it's a circle, that's hard, you go all around. But if they're map squares – say you're working in ten map squares by ten map squares, you try and get at least one map square north south east and west of you that no one can go into. That means that if your soldiers go

astray a little or they're right on the boundary line and you want to bring artillery or air strike in on them, you've got that capability without hitting a neighbour's force.

28:00 They're at Blackhorse in Long Khanh province directly north of Phuoc Tuy Province where we were. We're working up on the 89 Northing in the Courtney Rubber Estate. The Courtney Rubber Estate was just west of Route 2, a not very flash highway. It was made of dirt. A few little villages along it. We were ambushing in there for quite a time I think as I remember.

28:30 So that guaranteed. Tran Van Nhut didn't want any trouble either. So he said to me, "You have that space there." I think it went up to about the 92 northing. I just drew a line right across his main battle map and every other map that I could see in the place. Just drew a line and put 'Australians' and Vietnamese for Australian is Uc Da Loi and Uc Da Loi across it meaning that area was ours.

29:00 That they couldn't go into it. We never had incidents of us hurting the South Vietnamese. The other unit that was inside that Blackhorse area was a Colonel Ivy – and forgive me, but I can't remember the name of the designation but it was an infantry rifle battalion. He was a very clever and likeable fellow and very co-operative. He

29:30 let me have access to his officers' mess. Now Private Sleep was my batman as an intelligence officer and Private Sleep was a linguist. He was a very good table tennis player and represented Australia and had played against China and through Europe at table tennis. He could speak Vietnamese and French. I told him never to let on to the Vietnamese that he could speak French because it was French Indochina and a lot of the Vietnamese could speak French and when I went into contact with them

30:00 and they thought I could speak Vietnamese they'd break into French thinking I couldn't speak French – which I can't. But Private Sleep could. Anyway the chance of a lifetime came as it does in life and this particular day I was talking to the colonel and he said, "Oh, Guy Wee" (that's captain) "I hear Sleep plays table tennis." And I said, "Very good too, sir, world standard."

30:30 "The officers are coming from Saigon. They play very well. I'd like to win." "Okay." "Private Sleep can play for us?" I said, "Oh no sir. He's a private soldier, he's not allowed in officers' mess." "Oh." And the Vietnamese always find a way around something. I could see what he was getting at. He said, "There's got to be a way." I said, "You could make him an honorary second lieutenant, a Tui." "Oh. Tui Sleep

31:00 now!" So Private Sleep becomes Tui Sleep and he goes and plays table tennis and he's killing these blokes. He really was. Well old Tran Van Nhut he's got a smile from ear to ear and the Australians were Christmas. He thought we were just wonderful people. I said to Sleepy, "Whenever you hear something, especially if it comes in French, from these guys that have come down from Saigon, what I want you to do is go to the toilet or whatever and write it down,

31:30 give it to me without anyone seeing and if it's got to go on the radio just tell me what you want done and I'll sneak off and do it while you're playing." Anyway he slipped this piece of paper into my pocket and he said, "On the radio now, boss," so I flew down and it's dark. I got into our hut and I turned the radio on and I spoke in clear and I pulled the message out of my pocket. Sleepy's pretty excitable.

32:00 So I said, "Zero Alpha, this is nine five alpha or whatever it was. I've just received this information which I believe to be correct. I've sent it in clear because of the time on it. Tonight at about twenty two hundred hours, ten o'clock, there'll be a party of eighteen Viet Cong that are going to go from near this location at Blackhorse

32:30 across towards your location and," I read it and I says, "they'll be dressed in black trousers and white shirts." Sleepy had put with, but it looked like white. With shirts. Black shirts, see. And the current governor general, Michael Jeffery, or Mick Jeffery, he was OC B company and they were in the Courtney Rubber ambushing. Mick come up on the radio

33:00 and he said, "Who are these guys? Waiters from the Caravel Hotel?" I said, "I don't really care or know who they are. I'm just telling about them. You get them." That was Sleepy's first go at the intelligence gathering. So as time went by – just one funny thing. The Vietnamese are very poor. The task that the colonel was given was just unbelievable. In this area, apart from the American battalion, he had

33:30 a fair slice of his own regiment which is about three battalions, but all of the support people that were supposed to be there all inside this fenced off area with a big main gate and all that and nothing flash and a few old huts that this air cavalry mob had left behind. And he had the wives or the dependents of all of his soldiers that were out on operations in a barbed wire area right in the centre of Blackhorse itself. They lived in terrible conditions.

34:00 Came Christmas Day and Tran Van Nhut said to me – he'd been a province chief over near Cambodia so he was a pretty powerful man and he had some contacts, but he said, "I'd like Colonel O'Neill to come up for Christmas, for your Christmas. I'm going to put on a party at the officers' mess. We'll have entertainment and good food. You tell Colonel O'Neill I'd like to entertain him

34:30 for Christmas lunch." So I sent a message back to Colonel O'Neill and he couldn't make it so he sent Adrian Clunies-Ross because Adrian had been on the training team and had lived with the Vietnamese for some time. I'll never forget. We were around a round table and the round table had a galvanised iron top on it like a tablecloth that had been nailed to it. In the centre was like a party Susan on a pipe and it

had eight slots in it.

35:00 It had – like a gutter on a roof where the rain comes down and a spout that ran onto the ground – and it was a concrete floor and we were out in the open. And all the Vietnamese families are behind us in a circle. Tui Tap and Choongsi Zoong with their wives are standing right behind me. I noticed that as each dish came out there was nothing for the Vietnamese soldiers. So they had the first course

35:30 was congealed ducks' blood and peanuts on a big plate. Then they had boiled duck eggs and the duck eggs came out on plates and you were given like a soup bowl and you take the duck egg and you cut it and you pray that you get the feet, not the head first up. They're fully formed duck inside it. Well Adrian Clunies-Ross I'll never forget the look on his face. And he looked at me and I said,

36:00 "I'll fix this. Don't worry about it." So I waited until everyone's talking and looking away and I took Adrian's egg first and gave it to Tui Tap and mine to Choongsi Zoong. So we got rid of that all right. Well the next thing that comes out, eight monkeys. And the monkeys get shoved into this thing and they shove their head right up into this round hole and they've got a big soya stove with boiling water like an old copper with the boiling water and a ladle.

36:30 The monkeys are chained around the pole so they can't move and they tell you to sit back from the table a bit and they pour the boiling water over the monkeys' heads and this goes on for about fifteen minutes I suppose. The idea is like a boiled egg, you boil the brain. They get a parang or like a machete and like they cut the top off a boiled egg. There's this brain in the top of the thing and you're supposed to ladle it out in your soup plate. Adrian and I passed on that.

37:00 Couldn't do anything with that. His entertainment was a stripper. I'll never forget. And this poor woman came out. And she was naked when she started. They'd put Johnsons baby powder or similar talcum powder on this concrete floor. And they had a record player and they played some stripper sort of music. This poor woman danced around and skid on the floor and all this. It was terrible. I'll never forget it. It was just so degrading. There was nothing

37:30 technical or clever or talented about it. She was that embarrassed she didn't know where to look. My heart went out to her that day. And poor Adrian and I were looking at our shoes and the sky. And that was Christmas. We stayed with them for some considerable time. Private Sleep had to leave.

38:00 He was a national serviceman. I'm not too sure whether his time as a national serviceman was up or not. But our first day – Kenny Sleep and I we'd been in country a fair while. So from November till just before Christmas. And we needed a haircut. When Colonel O'Neill sent us up there we were right – the accommodation we were given is with a Colonel Nick Blastos. He's a gung ho Yank infantry bloke from West

38:30 Point. He's a pretty generous sort of a fellow, but he just took one look at us and he said, "Get a haircut." I said, "Sorry sir we've been out in the bush." He said, "I know. Just get a haircut." He put us up in his own hut. He had a corner of it in his own private room. But that was pretty good. He used to get parcels from home and everything and his wife'd send him up salads and all in a tin. And he'd say, "Hey Captain Anderson? You like this?"

39:00 And Sleepy'd yell out for me, "Yes yes yes." And he'd give us lettuce and tomatoes and stuff that we couldn't get. He was pretty good like that. I missed Sleepy when he left us. He lives in South Australia now. When he left me in fact he went to B company and he worked for Mick Jeffery, the current governor general. He went home when his national service finished

39:30 and we've stayed in contact ever since and I saw him last year when I had to go across for a Legacy conference. He's got leukaemia and he's had it for a long time and he goes into remission and his wife has to give him body wraps sometimes twice a day. It's just terrible. Anyway Sleepy being Sleepy I said I was over there for a Legacy conference and I said, "On the Sunday we're having a memorial service

40:00 and the governor will be there – of South Australia and all this – and lunch at the cricket ground afterwards. Would you like to come to that?" He said, "Yeah. That'd be good." One of the legatees, Ralph Binn, had his family there so I knew he wasn't staying for lunch so I could take someone else's rations, cause you have to pay for all this stuff. Anyway I felt this punch in my back just before the parade started and there's Sleepy all dressed up with his Vietnam medals on and his cap.

40:30 I saw him and I nearly cried. You couldn't believe it. His skin. He looked as though he'd been sunburnt or really burnt in a fire. He didn't worry. It was just as though we'd never left each other. He did the march. I introduced him to everyone. Sat down and had lunch with us and everything. It's a pretty sad old thing. I just don't know what we can do for him any more.

41:00 All these cancers and leukaemia's and things that get hold of people for different reasons. I'll come back to another job.

Tape 4

00:30 Private Sleep and myself were sent away again on another detachment before he went to B company. Was I believe the first 15th Mechanised Infantry Battalion from the United States Army. They were over on route one, the main route that goes from Vung Tau up to Saigon.

01:00 They had armoured personnel carriers similar to the ones – I think the American army still uses them, but the Australian Army still uses them. They carried a section of men. They had another type that was set up as a command post. Colonel O'Neill sent me to make sure again that we had the boundary between us and them, that unit.

01:30 And he'd planned an operation where instead of attacking a hill from the bottom and fighting your way up we'd start from the top and fight our way down. To my mind that was the first time Australians had ever done such a thing. The plan was that on the day of the attack Colonel O'Neill would be in an Iroquois helicopter with artillery and armour advisers

02:00 and he would face north from south and I would be in another helicopter with the US Navy advisers and the armoured personnel carrier fellows, the cavalry. So I had about five Americans with me in the helicopter I was in – not counting the pilots and the gunners. To facilitate this

02:30 Kenny Sleep and I went in a few days earlier I believe. The colonel was approachable, but a very brash, gung ho sort of a bloke, 'can do' thing. Didn't seem to think about things much in my view. That worried me. So I asked him a lot of questions and the answers he gave me didn't make me a very happy person. So I said to Kenny Sleep, "We're going to have to ourselves while we're with this bloke.

03:00 You just keep your eyes and ears really open and anything that concerns you at all just tell me straight away. About our safety, I mean." An interesting thing about the transition again from the British fighting the CTs in Malaya to the Americans fighting the Viet Cong and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] in Vietnam in 1965 to the Americans and the Australians fighting the Viet Cong and NVA

03:30 in 1969/70 – the difference is just remarkable. Points of safety, integration, areas of responsibility, the technical way they did things, the self discipline and the morale and all that of the American army was just unbelievable. I just couldn't understand how they got away with anything in the end. Anyway, the colonel said to us,

04:00 "You can have one of these armoured personnel carriers to live in." I said, "No thanks, sir, if you don't mind we'll just sleep within the compound but on our own." "Oh okay." And with that Private Sleep and I found an area that we thought would be all right. You know the arc mesh you use on tennis courts to stop the ball going out? Well they had that and it's to stop the

04:30 rocket propelled grenades. Now, there's two types. There's an RPG, rocket propelled grenade, and they were either made in Russia or China. And they were either a type two or a type seven. The type two was the first ones that we ever came up against. They'd fire and the rocket would just swoosh. But the seven had an assist in it to give it more distance and oomph. They used to fire those things at the armoured personnel carriers. So they put the cyclone fencing up to

05:00 take the initial impact from the rocket and make it explode and therefore it'd only send a bit of hot molten metal forward, but mainly down, and it wouldn't penetrate the armoured personnel carriers. However, with infantry, different story. So Kenny Sleep and I dug a hole in the ground – what we call a weapon pit. They're normally about four foot long, two foot six deep,

05:30 eighteen inches wide. You have a bay where you can sleep and that's dug into it, normally in the direction of the enemy – where they're coming. So while we were digging this – one digs and the other one watches. We dug this hole and I'd noticed that the defoliant that they'd used was Agent Orange, the stuff you possibly heard about before that did so much harm to the American and Australian soldiers.

06:00 I'd seen these pools. Anyway Kenny Sleep actually sat in one and I don't know to this day whether that's the cause of his leukaemia or not. But I know he sat in it. I got him to change his trousers as soon as it was possible. And in fact it was that bad there, I moved the hole. We started digging in another place. Anyway the day for the

06:30 assault was drawing near and the colonel called us in for his final orders. It was evening. He finished his orders and asked for questions. I waited politely until all the Americans had finished with their questions and then I said, "Excuse me, colonel, but where you intend to put your tactical operations centre – TOC – that's a known mine area." I go back to what I was saying about Colonel O'Neill and the

07:00 gathering of intelligence and these mines incidents that we'd marked on our map. And I walked forward and I put the map down on the lectern in front of the colonel and showed him where his TOC was going to go on my map and all these mine incident marks. He said, "Oh Keith, that doesn't worry us. We're mechanised." And "ha ha ha." And of course all of his officers laughed as well. So I thought, okay. So the thing that this meant to

07:30 me was, I didn't know how much longer Colonel O'Neill wanted me to stay with this unit, and that meant that was I was part of his tactical operations centre, this minefield was my new home. The next day after the attack. There's a couple of things you're uncertain of when you do helicopter or airborne operations and that is, blade time with the Iroquois helicopters. You don't know what task they've been

given before,

08:00 what the refuelling problems have been, whether they've got the endurance to last or whether they've got to be called away to refuel, where the refuelling point's going to be. You're not briefed on that at all. So you should always expect the worst. So I said to Private Sleep, "This could by hairy tomorrow. I don't know where I'm going to land in relation to where you'll be. And I don't know what time

08:30 we're going to meet up again. Until that time comes, that's the armoured personnel carrier that you've been allocated to. Unless you're ordered otherwise I'd like you to sit on top of it, be aware of the mines," because he's intelligence trained, Sleepy, himself. He said, "Yeah I know. I've been thinking about this myself, boss." I said, "All right, when tomorrow comes I'll give you my flak jacket and helmet, you sit on them on top of the armoured personnel carrier and wear your own.

09:00 When the armoured personnel carrier stops you try and stay with it until you see me and I'll plod my way to you and get you back." He says, "Is it going to be that bad?" I said, "It could be. I don't know. It all depends on where I land. I promise you though as soon as I make visual contact with you I'll get you off that thing and get you with me." He said, "That's okay." Anyway came next day and it was a beautiful

09:30 sunny day and the chopper arrived, picked me up and all the people that were supposed to be were there. We checked with radio communications and everything was all right and I checked with Colonel O'Neill and he was right. We did the RV [Rendezvous] in the air and we faced each other in the choppers. We had everything serialised and Colonel O'Neill, like all Australian commanders, was spot on with everything. The staff that he had too, the operations officers and

10:00 the artillery blokes. Everybody just marvellous and you always felt that confident that everything was going to be all right. They had a US battleship way off Vung Tau so it was a fair way away from us. But there was one of the serials where this naval gunfire came and the fellow that was going to co-ordinate that was sitting beside me in the chopper. Came that serial and I'll never forget after all the other fire we'd seen brought down on top of this mountain

10:30 these naval guns looks like big garbage cans flying through the sky. All these rounds that impacted. Anyway the assault went all right and all the soldiers got down and you could see all the cavalry arriving round the corners round the bottom of the mountain to stop people getting away and all this stuff. And my pilot said, "We've got to go. I've run out of blade time." I said, "All right." He said, "I'll get you as close to the tactical

11:00 operations centre that I can." I said, "No. Don't worry about it too much. Just anywhere on the access track'll do. Wherever you can find a landing there." He said, "All right. That'll suit me better." So he went down and landed. I said to the fellows on the chopper, "Whatever you do, don't run around. You're on a minefield. Just follow my footprints as best you can." So I got us off the chopper. The chopper went. They can set mines off themselves.

11:30 I put the bayonet on the end of my M16 Armalite rifle and these blokes looked at me as though I was something out of Disneyland. I prodded in the ground and I said, "Okay. Just form up here in single file behind me and you look left, you look right," and gave the tasks of responsibility in case we were attacked. I prodded our way about twenty-five metres

12:00 to a fold in the ground which was all sand. I prodded all that. I lay them all down and I told them not to move. Anyway, wasn't a long time after that and I could hear the armoured personnel carriers coming and Private Sleep was on the second one. So I got him down and I said, "Follow my footprints," and I grabbed my flak jacket and helmet, put them on and we followed my footsteps back and we lay down.

12:30 And it wasn't much time at all later that I heard this terrible explosion. One of the armoured personnel carriers had hit one of the mines. Forgive me, but that's nineteen eighty and it's a fair while ago and I just can't remember because of all the incidents in your head about vehicles hitting mines that you're involved with, but I know there was a fair few people killed in it and I remember I left that unit

13:00 that day or a couple of days later. And that's when I changed over with Captain Rick Haynes. When I saw – I used to call him Beau, Monsieur Beauregarde, because he spoke French. But when Sleepy saw me in Adelaide he said, "Captain Haynes couldn't work me out, sir." I said, "Why's that?" "Oh well you two are a bit different." I said, "Yeah." He said, "You used to treat me like a mate. He used to treat me like a batman and he used to say, where's my meal?

13:30 and all this sort of stuff." He said, "Things are a bit different here. We all get our own meals." Anyway, Rick's dead now, god love him. But things were a bit different in Private Sleep's life after that he was saying. So I went back as 2IC of D company. We just swapped roles. Mal Peck and I were real good mates.

14:00 I used to follow him around. We'd go out for five days with a resupply – and I was telling you about weighing the gear on the gun on the thing at Kapyong Pad. It's a pretty lonely sort of a life as a company 2IC. No one can talk when you're on operations, or if you can it's a very faint whisper. You hear the signals on the radio in a very

14:30 faint whisper and that's about it. And the rest of the time you don't talk at all. We used to ambush by day in the rubber and Mal Peck'd find us a place to hide during the night or it'd be the other way round

where we'd ambush by night and hide in the day. There's still the humour in it. The things that

15:00 happen to you with the New Zealanders, the artillery that were sent to help us in support of it and I won't go into because it could be embarrassing to someone later on. But the looks on people's faces when they're caught out. It's something that when you have units in support of you, you have to realise that their training's not the same as yours. I'm not saying any better

15:30 or not as good, but different. Their attitude to staying alive is different to yours. They haven't had the close encounters with anyone that you've had. So therefore their attitude's different. I'll leave it at that. But I will talk about mealtimes. In 1970 the world had changed dramatically from 1965

16:00 in Vietnam. We used to cover vast distances as quickly as we could on foot. And if that was impractical we'd go by helicopter or armoured personnel carrier. But the last thing you want to do is to go to all the trouble to plan an operation and then have it all spoilt by being given away by the presence of a helicopter or an armoured personnel carrier. So infantry's best on its feet.

16:30 Mal Peck'd take us from one place in the morning and we'd walk/run – just about a run all day. There'd be nothing for us to cover vast distances in a day. And we'd find ourselves doing a similar task in a different area that next night. The Maori soldiers in particular were in support with us with the artillery, they had these

17:00 big – Paddy Bergin we used to call them – packs on their back like the boy scouts use. It's a big central pouch with pockets on the outside. For some reason what they needed next was always at the bottom of the pack. And I could never understand these guys at all. Anyway, I'm not trying to bore anyone, but I think to make the point it's worth it. 8 Battalion D company didn't

17:30 eat hot food. D company 8 RAR were allowed to light one match to light a cigarette through the day – none of a night. We never had hot brews, no tea or coffee – just cold water. No hot food. And we carried one small can of Yank Charlie ration for breakfast, one small can of Charlie ration for lunch and one big can for the evening meal. And that was it. Nothing else. No fruit, bikkies [biscuits], marmite,

18:00 anything. Nothing at all. And if we had have carried anything more than that – in defence of Mal Peck – how would I have ever picked – I reckon the pack would have been ten and a half stone the same as my body weight. But this is what we did to compensate for the water that we had to carry. And Mal's idea was that strange smells – we could smell nuk nan, the fish sauce that the Viet Cong and the NVA used, so why couldn't they smell our Charlie rations. They smoke, so his logic was that they wouldn't be able to smell the cigarette.

18:30 But matches, things like that, they could so we kept that to the minimum, just the one. The lesson I'm bringing out that when D company 8 RAR stopped for lunch, that's what we did. We stopped. Right on the track. Not a track as you know it. But the order of march that we were going along. We put the scouts out. Manned the machine guns

19:00 to protect the scouts, dig a trash pit – this is all done without a word. The all clear's given and you take out of your left hand basic pouch where your grenades are at the bottom and your ammunition the tin for lunch. Around your neck's your dog tags and your P38, it's an American can opener that comes with the Charlie rations. And you open the can. You eat with the end of the P38 or if you're lucky you've got a plastic spoon

19:30 and eat with that. You crunch up the tin. You hand the tin to the bloke that's in charge of the trash pit. He counts the number of blokes, counts the number of tins, puts them in, seals it all up, that's the end of all that. You have a mouthful of water, wash your mouth out. Put the water bottle back. Check everything. Check each other's equipment, stand up, scouts come in, machine guns on, off. Doesn't take long, does it? Now these Maori from the

20:00 FO fire observation officers' party – they'd take off their pack, this big Paddy Pallin pack – open it up and out'd come the photo of Mum, everything, their bedding, boots, socks and the lunch's right down the bottom. And they're looking at us as though we're weasels and then they eventually find the tin and they're just about to open it – too late. We're off again. They've got to bundle everything back up and off with us.

20:30 So it takes a while for people to learn how other people do things. And once they learn they're good. But it's not their fault, it's the training that they get. I think if we have future conflicts and people see this and they're in charge of planning units that don't normally see each other coming together, these are the things that they've got to look at, at soldier to soldier level. A) to save time, and B) to save lives.

21:00 The worst point about this that I've ever seen was one night we just taken a resupply and were in Binh Ba Rubber. That's closer to Nui Dat. And we got some engineers. Engineers come as mini teams. There's either three guys in the team or two. These guys were pretty new to Vietnam.

21:30 We'd taken the resupply pretty late. What you do, you pack everything up and you put on your clean green shirts if you can and you send back your dirty ones. This is after five days. And you take the rations for the next five days, the water for the next five days, the maps for the next five days, the ammunition for the next five days, and you get away from there as quickly as you possibly can. They

used to give us a finger meal. Be a bread roll, cheese and tomato

22:00 and a piece of fruit and a carton – god bless the Yanks – of American chilled chocolate milk. Never forget it. And you glug this down. But you can't get it all in because your stomach's shrunk. That little tin and this little tin and that big tin equals not much in the tum tum at the end of the day. Anyway, I don't know how we did it. We got it in. You see the diggers kind of balance what they're going to do with the

22:30 part of the bread roll that they couldn't eat. And they tuck in their shirt. Some'd tuck it under their hat. In your side pocket. Anyway we run away from where we'd taken the resupply and we settled down for the night. That's a ritual that we've all rehearsed hundreds of times and know it like the back of our hand. As soon as it's half an hour before last light we stand to.

23:00 In 1 Battalion's day we used to dig in. We'd dig a shell scrape. The hole I described to you before except it was only about a foot deep so that if an artillery shell or a mortar round went off beside you, you could be protected. 8 Battalion didn't do that in this context. So we just lay on the ground. No flak jackets or helmets, just the green shirt

23:30 and this little hat I told you about. Anyway we stand to with all our basic webbing on and our weapons pointed to the front and complete silence. No one moved. They send a clearing patrol out and it goes right round the perimeter and comes in and makes sure no one's followed us or laying up approximate to us of a night. Then you stand down and you just sit there or lie there and the machine gunners

24:00 man the gun and the section 2IC's beside the machine gun and the number two 2IC of the guns beside them. So everyone knows their job for the night and what's going to happen. In the army, same as in civilian life, everybody has to relieve themselves. The bodily functions. But this is done with greater discipline. In a house you've got your toilet in your bathroom. The same in infantry. You've got a tree where you can go

24:30 to stand up, if you get what I mean. Then for a more grave situation it's in front of the machine gun. So it's another ten paces or so out in front of the machine gun and they dig a pit there and that's where you go in full view of the gunner. It's not nice for the gunner and it's not nice for the bloke, but that's the way life is. At night, if you have to go, that's bad luck, you just go. There's nothing you can do. This particular night he had a canvas cover over

25:00 himself and he was working on something. His orders for the next day I suppose. I couldn't hear his voice at all, but he was only about two metres behind me. I was just about to go to sleep. We were in like savannah country, but it was sparsely treed area, but it had very high dead grass.

25:30 And I could hear this rustle. And you often hear things like that cause there's tigers in Malaya and there's tigers in Vietnam. A lot of people don't know this and they've never even seen them. One night in our first fire support base – we called it Peggy after Peggy O'Neill, sense of humour – we had a tiger in with us. We just put the last of the wire up and wired ourselves in and got this bloody tiger inside.

26:00 All the officers volunteering for CP [Command Post] duty that night. Anyway we got through the night without the tiger eating anyone and we let it out the next morning. I don't know – I never saw that ritual, but it got out. But I thought it could have been a tiger, it could have been anything. It's coming forwards. So I said to the machine gunner and the 2IC of the section, "You just be ready, but I'm going to try and fix this." So I didn't say anything and I already had a round up the spout

26:30 of my armour light, so I recocked it . It makes a bit of a noise like a slide click, like that. It's a sound every soldier recognises. The rustling stopped dead and this voice said in Australian, "Don't shoot. It's us." I thought, they're definitely Australians because no way Vietnamese can say something like that. So I said, "Keep coming slowly towards me. Can you hear?" "Yep."

27:00 He's saying, "Shut up out there." He didn't know what was going on. It was these two guys, engineers from the mini team. One of them wanted to go to the toilet really badly. They hadn't been taught what to do so he grabbed his hand like Hansel and Gretel and away they go outside and they came back a different way to the way they went out. Now the soldier on the machine gun could have taken those two guys straight out.

27:30 So you're wild, but relieved. You get the two guys back in and you tell them quietly without saying – you can't yell at them – "Just go where you are if you've got to go again through the night." Everything that happens normally happens in a cool calm

28:00 way in an infantry battalion. I've never heard any soldier criticise an officer for not being anything but cool. And just lately because of Mike Jeffery being the Governor General, Tony Yuha and other officers who were in his company were asked by the press and the TV fellas what sort of a fellow was he, what was he like in action. Because Mick got a Military Cross.

28:30 His action was related to why 8 Battalion got the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm as a unit citation which we all proudly wear today. The battalion still wears it while they're members of that battalion, but all those that served at the time wear it. 1 RAR was given a citation too, the Meritorious Unit Citation by the American government for work that they did and funnily enough – it's not funny, it's

a bit of a

29:00 disgrace really. The 173rd Airborne was also given the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm and 1 RAR should have been given that as well and they've been fighting up till the last couple of years to ask the politicians to let them have it. They've earnt it. They were part of 173rd Airborne and they didn't get it. Anyway, 8 Battalion did get it and

29:30 they said that Mike in action was cool. Cool. That's the way. I believe in God and I said at my mother's funeral the other day that my mother had a soldiers' God that not only found in church but wherever he's needed. Things seem to slow down when they have to.

30:00 The pace is tolerable. And you don't see any sign of panic or distress and everyone knows their job. What I saw of 8 Battalion and 1 Battalion and 3 Battalion in Malaya and 2 Troop plus all the people that supported us

30:30 I'm very proud to be an Australian and very proud to have served with them. They're just all great guys and competent capable people. I just hope if we need soldiers in the future that they're as lucky as I, that those blokes are as good and as trained as that. And training is the main thing. The amount of warning that you can give people is another thing. To give them all the assistance that you possibly can because training for war is hard

31:00 and training for war without money for training isn't impossible, we've done it, but it is hard and it shouldn't be necessary. 8 Battalion did very well. They had a lot of trouble with mine incidents. We hit mines in armoured personnel carriers

31:30 and up in the Courtney's one afternoon D company were mounted in army personnel carriers and it was raining and some of our soldiers were hurt pretty badly. We got them in to choppers and sent them back to the hospital at Vung Tau. We weren't allowed to, but some of us

32:00 did carry radios in our pockets with the little earpiece in it. To let us know they were all right they put over armed forces radio for D company 8 RAR and they played "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head" and it's funny cause every time you hear it you can

32:30 still smell the smoke, the cordite and hear the blokes. Snakes are another thing. You never know where you're going to come across one. And usually you make so much noise – not loud noise, but noise that snakes will run away from – sometimes we're so quick that they can't get away. I've had

33:00 times where I've called out in my sleep that I've thought that a snake was in bed with me. The CO's said, "No. Come on. You're just tired." I've actually had them in bed with me. I've had them crawl across my face. I've never been bitten by one. But our medic in A company, Ben Murphy's company, he put his boot on one morning back in the base camp at Nui Dat of all places

33:30 and he was bitten by a snake and we thought he'd died. One Anzac Day in Sydney – I've got a photo of him inside – there he is large as life. I saw him again up in Maroochydore one Anzac Day and he was in a wheelchair so he wasn't doing real well. But I don't think that was the result of the snake bite. But some of those little snakes, you wouldn't' think that their mouth would be wide enough to

34:00 bite, but they are. They're called Pit Vipers. The cobras – two and a half times their own length and we've had them eleven and a half foot long and Mum and Dad and the three kids – two long snakes and three little ones. One night in Malaya Phil Pritchard had to move a kilometre at night to get away from these blokes. We caught them the next day. Killed them.

34:30 I think the support that 8 Battalion had – particularly the American helicopter pilots – there's comparisons to them all, whether they're fair or not I don't know. But 9 Squadron RAAF supported us with Iroquois helicopters. The other support we got was from Americans.

35:00 The American pilots in some cases were warrant officer pilots as in the case in the early days with 173rd Airborne in Vietnam in '65. Those fellas would do anything to help. I've seen them actually physically with their rotor blades, chop down parts of trees to get in to get our fellas out. Every pace you take it's an officer's responsibility with an infantry

35:30 battalion to know exactly where you are on the ground. You mark on your map every space that you pass that you can get a jungle penetrator through to get the wounded out or that the helicopter can actually land to get the wounded out. The way that the resupply was done was always spot on with timing and quick and efficient. The fellas

36:00 back at base camp, Mal had an argument with the D company 8 RAR cooks one day. He said to the sergeant, "All right you fellas can come out with us for a while." Well that showed them what we did. And made them appreciate us. The food was Mickey Mouse after that. There's a fella and I won't say his name, but he was with us in

36:30 the first trip and in 1 RAR before we went away. Private soldier, then corporal. He went to Malaya with us in '68, '69 and I got to know him pretty well. Then he ended up in our D company 8 RAR as a sergeant. There's two points for this. One's R & R [Rest and Recreation]. I don't think it's a very wise move for a married fellow to go back

37:00 home to Australia on R & R. Mal had the right idea himself. He didn't take R & R himself at all. Anyway I took it and I regretted it to this day. Five days isn't long enough. You become disoriented. When you sleep you don't know whether you're dreaming that you're home dreaming that you're in Vietnam or if you're in Vietnam dreaming that you're home. You can see the sadness in your wife's eyes.

37:30 You can see all the things that you miss. You worry about your mates back in Vietnam. To enjoy yourself's an impossibility. You don't want to drink too much. You can't mix with anyone else. You don't want to mix with anyone else. You don't have a good time at all. The day comes

38:00 when you've got to go back and it's like lightning. You open your eyes, clean your teeth and next thing you know you're on a plane. You don't know how your wife's going to cope. It's just terrible. That's my experience. Others might find it different, I don't know. But I don't think it's a good idea. I think an in country rest of longer than one day that they used to give us at the [Peter] Badcoe Club [Australian soldiers' club in Vung Tau] might have been better.

38:30 On the first trip we had R & R in Saigon. The soldiers had one day. Get there at nine or so in the morning and then come back in the afternoon. The officers, if we knew someone that had a room for us to stay in we could stay that night. Usually you slept on the floor. I was lucky, I had a mate there, from engineers. He let me use his room. This particular time on R & R this fellow

39:00 we'd grown pretty close and he was a bloody good sergeant, his diggers loved him and anyway when you know someone like that and you're stuck on a United flight it was and all I can remember, the hostess came from Tallahassee, a Yank girl. The Americans on the plane were not normal people and they didn't behave very well.

39:30 We landed in Darwin and it didn't look like the flight was going to continue. Anyway they delayed us in Darwin for a while and eventually we took off again and got home. After the R & R we met again and they had a meeting place for us at Kings Cross. There was an Australian girl there who was a friend of my wife, Sonia, so I had a talk to her for a little while. But she was

40:00 a bit busy. My mate and myself were about the only two Australians on the flight. Coming down he was real chipper, but on the way back he was sullen and quiet. There was something up his nose. Anyway landed at Ton San Nhut and it was late in the afternoon and they said at movements that – used to put us on C123s

40:30 Hercules, a small C130.

Tape 5

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

03:17 But the way things happen. People joke about Friday night at five o'clock when you need help in your house when the plumbing fails or the electricity fails

03:30 and you try and get a plumber or an electrician at five o'clock on a Friday night. Everyone's knocked off and gone home or to the pub or wherever they go. It wasn't much different in those days in downtown Vietnam. Things'd happen in the dark, pouring rain, the corner of four map squares – you've got to get these four maps put back together. You try and plan for everything possible thing and then things go wrong and things go

04:00 bump in the night. And this is another problem I find with resupply and R & R. You take an officer or a sergeant out of a rifle platoon and you're taking away the two key personnel. The responsibility then falls on the corporals. We've all got our own battle load. I explained to you what we carry.

04:30 Well, who carries the strobe light? Who carries the maps? Who carries the compass, who carries the protractor? Because weight's so important. The platoon commander and the platoon sergeant? The platoon commander divides it up the way he wants to. The section commanders, what do they carry? To attract a helicopter at night you've got voice on the radio, they accept the mission and their task and they come in to do it. Then how do you get them down onto the ground?

05:00 In the jungle where space is pretty tight and you're very fortunate if you're ambushing anywhere near a

site where you can get a helicopter in to get casualties out.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

06:28 But that's

06:30 about all I've got to say about R & R. I don't think it's a real flash idea. I think you either make the postings shorter – for six months. That's not practical because it takes you a year to really find your feet and be professional. A year's a long time, but the two years we did in Malaya as a young bloke, that was a very long time. I thought that'd never end. Later on I'd like to talk to you about Bob.

07:00 Bob was similar. He was with 1 RAR on the first trip as a platoon commander at Bien Hoa. He was with us in Malaysia – as a platoon commander again. And he was with us in Vietnam again as a platoon commander with 8 Battalion . He and I had both been trained in joint warfare

07:30 as ground liaison officers. I'd asked for a posting when I'd finished my time in Malaysia to go to the RAAF base with 5 Squadron at Canberra with Iroquois helicopters and Bob wanted to go to Richmond with the Caribou and Hercules. He was married and we were really good mates. Anyway the postings came out reversed. I said to him, "Oh Bob would you mind

08:00 very much if I asked the adjutant if we can change them back because I really want to be with Iroquois, I really like them?" He said, "Oh no, that's fine with me." Anyway we changed them back and he went to Richmond with the C130s and the Caribou and they sent him up to New Guinea at Port Moresby. And what I used to do I in those days,

08:30 the battalions that were stationed in Port Moresby we'd ask for air support. I'd go up as a ground liaison officer and I'd meet them either at their battalion area or they'd come down to Moresby to meet me and we'd do the briefings on what they wanted. Then we'd come back and I'd present that to the RAAF and they'd talk about what they could do and couldn't do. So prioritise it. I'd send the final list back to Murray Barracks in Port Moresby.

09:00 They'd accept the tasks the way they wanted it. Then when the time came we'd take the rotor blade off a Delta Hotel model Iroquois and slide it up into the back of a C130 Hercules and we'd fly away and do the detachment. It might be a week or two weeks. We'd land at Wewak and we'd stay at the Sepik Hotel at Wewak. Next day we'd put the rotor back onto the

09:30 Iroquois and take it up to Vanimo and test fly it and bring it back. We'd do jobs around Wewak, Madang. Lae, Popondetta, then fly over the gap into Moresby and then up and down the Brown River and then we'd put the aircraft back in the C130 and come home. I was on the first or second of these trips and I met Bob in Port Moresby and he said, "Oh come home. Have some

10:00 feed with the missus." "Yeah all right." So home we went, had some dinner. Next day I went and did my job, he went and did his and he went up with a Caribou full of school cadets. They were going up a re-entrant in one of the big valleys and the tip of the wing touched a tree. It brought them all down and killed them all. So we lost Bob, but how lucky was I that I didn't let

10:30 the postings be the way they were. That's bad for a way.

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13:39 **We're just asking you about having been interviewed?**

Back in 1965 in Vietnam at Bien Hoa – I told you about Reg Boulter, the cameraman. He was in company with a fellow called Anthony

14:00 Cave Brown and he was sent up by GTV9 in Melbourne. TV station. We'd just come out of war zone D and it would have been about the fourth operation we had in there. Because I helped Reg Boulter, his cameraman he decided to pick on me for something –

14:30 I don't know what it was – but he came up to me and said that he wanted to do an interview for the news in Melbourne and Sydney, would I agree? And I thought, "Oh well it'll be good for Sonia to see I'm still all right." I said, "I'm not much use to you. You'd be better off with one of the rifle companies." He said, "Oh no we've done all them. No." So I said, "I'll have to clear it with the CO."

15:00 So I went and saw Lou Bunfield and Lou said, "Watch him. Just watch all that is said. Just get him to list all the questions and tell him that I want to clear them before he does the interview." So I went back and told Anthony Cave Brown what Lou had said. He said, "Oh fair enough." So he sat down and he wrote out about twenty questions I guess. Lou said, "Oh yeah. That's all right. Still be careful." So

15:30 I sat there and did the interview and he didn't ask me one question that was on that sheet. Not one. And it's very hard – especially when you're young and inexperienced at life generally, but to answer questions like that. To give an answer on the spot while you're on the TV camera and you know it's going to go on and your family and your mates' families are going to see it all.

16:00 It's not a very nice thing to make an agreement with someone that you're going to ask them a set of questions, have it all cleared and then not ask those questions at all. I found that rather awkward. At times the relations with the press, the newspaper fellas in particular, some of them

16:30 got on very well with the soldiers. Some of them came out on operations with us where they were allowed and this is in the early days, because remember I said I came home early. I only did four months with them. Reg Boulter was the only TV crew that I saw. When I say crew there was just he and a camera and Cave Brown. Gerald Stone who did 60 Minutes – he was a reporter with the Mirror.

17:00 It was around midday one day in war zone D and Lou Bunfield called me up and he said, "This is Mr Gerald Stone from the Mirror in Sydney." Gerry's got a Yank accent and he had it very strongly in those days. I said, "G'day." He said, "What do you do?" And I told him that I was a pioneer platoon and we were responsible for

17:30 clearing mines and booby traps and all this sort of stuff. And I said to Lou, "What do you want me for?" He said, "See those two vases over there?" They're blue and white pottery vases. I suppose the Vietnamese stored eggs in them like the Chinese do. But they were more slender than the egg jars you see. They would have been about a metre tall, very ornate blue and white, very well made. There they are sitting out in the middle of the jungle.

18:00 So I said to Lou, "These could be booby trapped." He said, "That's why I called you." Gerald Stone said, "Do you mind if I help you?" I said, cause my diggers were having lunch, "That'll save me interrupting the fellas." And Gerald Stone and I went through the whole procedure of pulling a booby trap and he wrote an article about that in the Mirror. But I think the other thing

18:30 that soldiers are very concerned about with interviews is that your words that they report – because at the time you can't remember what you said – but instead of just covering what we did he made a comment that – I've still got the cutting here – "possibly most typical of the way the soldiers feel is expressed by Lieutenant Anderson, an assault pioneer commander who

19:00 was carefully pulling a suspected Viet Cong booby trap when he said, "I'm not going to take any unnecessary chances. I have a wife and baby to go home to." For the life of me I can't remember me saying that. And Stephen my eldest son was born just prior to that. So give him the benefit of the doubt. I've got nothing against Gerry Stone, I think he's a real great guy and he did his job well. But it's the things that goes through

19:30 soldiers' minds when you are being interviewed. And the other thing people have got to remember is that often you're tired. You don't feel like having a party. Your thoughts are mainly your own and your concentrating on the lives of the soldiers you're responsible for. So it's a pretty mixed bag. I know of officers that have been misquoted and I know of officers that have been a bit concerned about what's been reported.

20:00 But I think when soldiers are a long way from home and people are concerned about their welfare – especially young blokes with young wives and they're pregnant, and your Mum, you don't want to upset any of them. Just thinking – one thing leads to another in your mind. Must have been just before that. We'd been out in war zone D for about five days I guess.

20:30 Ron Ducci the adjutant said, "We've got four wounded fellows here. They can't walk through this rice paddy right up to where the chopper's going to pick us up at the pick up zone. I want you to stay with them and I promise you I'll send a helicopter back to pick you up, but where it's going to take you, I don't know." In other words, where in the Bien Hoa area. I said, "All right." So there I am, a second lieutenant with an Owen gun,

21:00 no radio, four wounded soldiers and they all had weapons – I can't remember what sort of weapons they were – and when you see the last helicopter go and its really eerie and everything goes very quiet and you wait and wait and you think, "What do I do? What if a chopper doesn't come? What if the Viet Cong come? What do I do with these four wounded blokes?" And they're looking at each other

21:30 and you try to cheer them up saying, "She'll be right. Be here in a minute." And eventually you hear this wokka wokka, this beautiful Iroquois coming. We all scramble towards it. Took us back and he dropped

us at some remote spot. It was in the Bien Hoa base, but it wasn't the 173rd Airborne. I asked this officer if he'd lend me his jeep to take the four wounded blokes back.

22:00 Anyway something happened. It doesn't matter much, but I got in the jeep and I drove the fellas back and I went to tell Colonel Bunfield what I'd done. John Dwyer, he's six foot seven, John, and he'd been very friendly with Sonia and I. He's six foot seven and his mate, Billy Kane, was one of the shortest fellas in the battalion. They were in the rear party that come up with Charlie Company and they'd seen Sonia after I'd left in the advance party.

22:30 And John was that excited. He had a piece of paper in his hand. He came out of the CP [Command Post] which is a hole in the ground and he's waving the paper over his head and he spotted me. And he said, "Ando, baby, we're a father," and that's when Stephen was born. But what reminded me of it's the barbed wire. Colonel Bunfield said he wanted the pioneers to put a barbed wire fence around battalion headquarters and I jokingly said to him, "Is that to keep you in or the press

23:00 out?" But a lot of them stayed in Saigon at the Caravel Hotel. They had a bar on the eighth floor. As I said before, you didn't get much leave in Saigon. We didn't have much money to spend anyway. Saigon, with the Yanks there, is a very expensive place. It's a complete opposite situation than I described to you with the Poms in Malaya. They had no money and we had some. Well, with the Yanks,

23:30 a spec four – a specialist fourth class in the American army with jump pay with 173rd Airborne plus his specialist pay and his combat pay got more money than a second lieutenant or a lieutenant did in the Australian army. It was just incredible. Anyway I'd just been down Tudo Street and I saw a sign on a restaurant window and it had 'French Onion Soup – eight dollars US'

24:00 and it must have had something else with it, but I thought, "Geez I like French onion soup," so I dived into this place, had the bowl of French onion soup and there I was penniless. I got up to where the Caravel Hotel is. There's another one opposite called The Oriental I think. But I could hear this American voice yelling out, "I want to meet an Australian. I want to talk to an Australian. Isn't there an Australian anywhere in Saigon?" And I said, "Yes. I'm an Australian.

24:30 What's wrong?" He said, "Where are you stationed?" I said, "I can't tell you." He said, "Are you with the Australian Army?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well you've got to be out at Bien Hoa." I said, "I didn't tell you that." He said, "All right. Will you talk to me for a while?" I said, "It all depends." He said, "I'll shout you lunch and a beer." I said, "Okay." So we go up to the eighth floor into this bar and it turns out his name was Walt Kelly. And in the comic strips in the Sydney papers there was a little strip

25:00 called Pogo and he used to write that. It was about a little critter that lived in a swamp and all the troubles he got into. Here in the local paper there's something like a couple of ducks that do flying schools and all that. Similar to that. Anyway he's trying to pump me for information. I'm sure that whatever I told him he was going to write and send back to his office in America. He was good to his word. He brought me some lunch and a couple of beers. But I saw one of the press fellas

25:30 in there then. Just amazed me the way they lived and the stories they used to write. I'm not saying they all did that. Some of the cameraman and things like that you've seen yourself in the releases of late they are very brave fellas that did some extraordinary things. In the main I think they were pretty good. Ramsay I think, one fellow, he did a lot with B company cause I can remember Peter Syree talking about him, the way that he treated them.

26:00 He said they seemed pretty happy with him. I don't know if I covered the medivac [Medical Evacuation] system. I think for future reference if the wounded can be taken from the battlefield as fast as they were in Vietnam – we were better treated from the time the soldier was wounded until they got into the hospital and the first operations

26:30 were done on them than a traffic accident in Sydney. Just marvellous. The system beyond that – I don't know whether I told you I went to Singapore and then back to Butterworth? The facilities they had at Butterworth, it was only an Australian and British air base but the facilities they had in Singapore were amazing, and the tests they could do on us and everything. And they told me that they

27:00 couldn't operate on me in Singapore because what was wrong was too close to my heart. We're going back to 1965. This is all done in service aircraft – C130s or the equivalent. They flew me back to Butterworth and then the decision was made to send me home. We went from Butterworth in a stretcher. The aircraft was full of Australian wounded and sick and they're called medivac.

27:30 There's a nursing sister in the aircraft with you. There's a toilet as I remember. But I was in a stretcher right at the rear of the aircraft. I had a porthole right by my head so I could see out the window. The food was delivered in shoeboxes like the army always used to do in transit. The first stop was Cocos Island and we landed on Cocos Island and they let us get out and walk around –

28:00 those of us that could. Then we refuelled, got back in the aircraft. Then we went to Pearce, an air base in Western Australian near Perth and Fremantle. They put us in the hospital there, just a small RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] hospital on the air base. We stayed there overnight. I can remember customs coming through and they were coming into our ward. There was two of us, myself and a soldier and the soldier was very bad and he

28:30 couldn't keep any food down. He kept on bringing it up. They entered the ward just as he through up and they just turned around and walked out. But we had nothing to declare anyway. The next day they put us on the same C130. We flew from Pearce to Richmond air base west of Sydney. We flew straight across the Nullarbor. Just amazing to see that lying on your back in a stretcher.

29:00 We were met and taken by ambulance to 2 Military Hospital at Ingleburn. The way they cared for us and looked after us. Just amazing. And if you had a concern about any of the soldiers they wouldn't just say, "Oh he's all right." They go and check and come back and say that he said to tell you so and so, so you knew that they'd checked on him. It was really good. I stayed in there I think till about December.

29:30 So it's a fair while from September, October, November, December. They let me out. A few times I felt like I should have gone back in. You get through it all. But that system, and the soldiers know the system. From what I've been told, the soldiers that were shot in the chest and things like that – they used to really take great care to make sure there was no brass

30:00 or anything left in them. The surgery was done very well and almost immediate. On the second trip with 8 RAR I had a mate called Phil Thomson, he was a Duntroon graduate. I think his sig [signaller] stood on a mine – an M16 I told you about. It blew his jaw down and it just all fell down.

30:30 They sent him through this system. I was working as a G3 air at Victoria Barracks in Sydney and I was doing the approach control radar at Mascot Airport. So when aircraft are approaching Sydney one special radar system looks after them which is different to the

31:00 departures. The artillery units and the range control officers that do the practice in Sydney for artillery, mortars, anything like that, they have safety templates. The range control officers tell the people who are conducting the practise exactly what they can do and when they can do it, what altitude they can fly at or to. And they are ordered whenever an aircraft is approaching

31:30 they're to cease firing beforehand and then they're told they can go on when the aircraft's safely past. It's a pretty responsible job. So my job was to have all these templates. I'd speak to the people at range control, they would tell me exactly what it was and I'd fill the template in and verify it with them again. Then I'd take that to the approach control radar and give it to the operator that was controlling that aircraft that was going to cross Holsworthy or North Head at that time.

32:00 I went down to get the Telegraph, the daily newspaper, and 1 RAR had a blue lanyon and we used to wear it on the left. I could see this patch of blue and it just didn't connect with me because 8 RAR was grey and Thomson should have had a grey one. So just saw the flash of blue

32:30 and then this terrible pain in my back. Someone had thumped me in the back. I spun round ready to hit them whoever it was and it was Phil Thomson and I just forget which side it was, but there was just the faintest little scar on his lip. Just amazing. They kept him in Singapore until he was all fixed up again. I think the whole thing was that they thought it was better to hold them back in Singapore until they were handsome young devils again

33:00 to present them to their wives or mothers. I think that was pretty good. I just hope that the armed forces can keep doing that.

Can you talk to us about the actual when you were saying that the wounded on the field would be getting a quicker response than a traffic accident in Sydney, can you tell us how that all worked?

Yep. A lot of the procedures are rehearsed in training. As I said before, every step that an officer

33:30 takes, he knows exactly where he is on the map and he's identified all of the places where he can get a jungle penetrator down or to actually winch a soldier out or to land the helicopter. They've got a procedure called dust off. The Americans ran it. I'm not too sure whether we used Australian helicopters or not when 8 RAR were up there or not. What happens is the platoon on the ground has an incident and someone's

34:00 injured, wounded. What we do, we request a 'dust off', we send the grid reference of where we are in clear. We had a thing called a Viewie Tewie. It's a plastic booklet with plastic insert sheets in it and the standing operation orders of the battalion or unit you're with. Those pages that are relevant to that are either made of plastic or sealed in some

34:30 way and they slide inside that insert. You have china graph pencils and you can write down all the information you need and you hand it to the sig and he sends that message across to battalion headquarters. And the admin [administration] air net get it. There's a battalion command net where the CO does all the fighting and moving. Then there's the admin air net where the administration's all done. And air support and all that sort of stuff's taken care of.

35:00 The helicopter comes as soon as they can possibly get it. Or if that's not the easiest way or if there's no – they carry the casualty out to the nearest point. Then they meet them with an armoured personnel carrier or land rovers, ambulance, but it's nearly always a chopper. It's very rare to my knowledge that they wouldn't get them out by air. They've got destinations. At Nui Dat the hospital is called Red Earth. They've got code names.

35:30 They'd fly the casualty – depending what it was – directly to Red Earth or they'd go down to Vung Tau to one of the hospitals. The Australian nursing staff there were just brilliant. They were just gorgeous, dedicated, competent people. The soldiers that were wounded had nothing but praise for them. The system, like I said, was back to Singapore or Butterworth and then home.

36:00 With 8 Battalion I got almost to the – it must have been past July because I came home on R & R in the April. I had to go back to Black horse not with a training team

36:30 - the army training team was a specialised separate unit. They taught the Vietnamese army at different locations throughout South Vietnam. They were mainly headquartered in Da Nang. But they were separate and specialists and they were nearly all warrant officers, captains and majors and the odd colonel. But apart from them we used to teach

37:00 our regular force, popular force, with mat teams. Military advisory teams or mobile advisory teams. That was normally done by a lieutenant. But there was a special task – the 10th Division which was in charge of 48th ARVN regiment, they had a special task that their chief of staff wanted done. They had all of these soldiers

37:30 that were to go out and actually teach the regular force, popular force – that's something akin to our Citizens' Military Forces that we have here. They mainly guarded outposts in townships throughout the provinces. I was given about a hundred students. Might have been more. They were all South Vietnamese. There was a Dai Wee, a Vietnamese captain in charge of them and one

38:00 Tui who had been recently captured by the North Vietnamese Army and he either escaped or he was – he wasn't released, but they got him back somehow. I never went into the story, but it didn't ring true to me. I had nothing to do with Tran Van Nhut at this stage except that I was on his base. I didn't really have to report to anyone.

38:30 I was given six warrant officer instructors. One was an armoured corps sergeant, but he was a very good fellow. The other was a New Zealander. A warrant officer. Anyway they put us in a Caribou aircraft and flew us from Nui Dat up to Blackhorse. So I had no vehicle, nothing like that. We lived in some old huts that were

39:00 right at the southern end of Blackhorse. We were rationed with an American training team. I'm not too sure if they looked after Colonel Tran Van Nhut's units or not. I never met any officer that was in charge of them, but there was another American unit posted in there. They used to look after me to a degree and

39:30 invite me to their barbecues they used to call it, their Sunday cookouts. But there was a Sergeant Tun who was their admin sergeant. He used to look after the six warrant officers all the time. They used to sleep down where I was where the students were and we dug our own weapon pits and we were responsible for our own protection within the base. The Vietnamese

40:00 were responsible for their own rationing so whether they did that through the 48th ARVN Regiment or their own system I don't know but 10 Division were responsible for them. The warrant officers and sergeant instructors I had were first class fellas. Some of them I knew very well. I had to write the training program for the full period that we were there and do a presentation for General Tu before the course started.

40:30 That's pretty disconcerting because the general's English was as good as my Vietnamese if you understand what I mean. So you had to talk very slowly. And when I get excited – well I normally talk fast anyway, but I tend to talk a bit fast. And it was a pretty overwhelming that the room that the presentation was given in was like an auditorium and it was full of a lot of brass – American generals and Vietnamese generals.

41:00 I had to follow an American captain and he spoke utter tripe. How he was going to turn these blokes into six foot Martians and all this sort of stuff and going to teach them how to do this and that. I hadn't prepared anything because they didn't tell me that I had to do a presentation. So as I do today if I have to give a speech somewhere I write the speech out, leave it at home and go away and

41:30 give the speech.

Tape 6

00:30 **So you're at this pow wow and you're just about to give your talk.**

Yeah. So I thought, well I'm not going to go on like that. So I just told him what it was and how I was going to do it in my way. And months later the CO called me in, Colonel O'Neill. He said, "Oh I got a letter of commendation for you from this Colonel Tu. How's that?" So I must have done all right with that? So anyway to get back to the actual training

01:00 the captain had a wife in Saigon. Now, this is 8 Battalion so the year now is 1980.

'80 or '70?

Sorry. 1970. So the Vietnam War started for the Vietnamese a long time before 1965. So they'd been at it all the time. This bloke wasn't a very happy camper at all. And here he is, he said it's the closest that he's been to Saigon where his wife was living in all his service life.

01:30 He really wanted a chance to go and see her. He said, "Can I borrow the jeep?" I said, "What do you want the jeep for?" "To go to Saigon." I said, "Well a. I haven't got a jeep and b. if I had a jeep the last thing I'd do is let someone hare off to Saigon." Because up there the roads were nasty places. You didn't go anywhere. Anyway he was like a despondent child.

02:00 I couldn't get him to agree to anything or do anything. Anyway the lessons all went happily and the instructors were doing the right thing and I used to go round and check on it all the time. But I noticed one day that whenever I went outside the actual area itself of Blackhorse which was fenced through the main gate and walked to where they were doing the ambushes or whatever it was or a range practice –

02:30 when someone fires at you it's like a crack thump as the round goes over your head. Now, one or two you think, yeah that's all right. But this was all the time. I had a talk to the warrant officer instructors and they said, "We've noticed every time you come towards us there's shots fired from somewhere nearby," and it wasn't the group but it was somewhere nearby. Anyway

03:00 would have been about the second week and things had come to a head and it was looking pretty dodgy and I didn't know how I was going to resolve all this. I wasn't getting any co-operation and the warrant officer instructors, they said things were a bit tense with the soldiers. The scuttlebutt – soldiers will talk to soldiers – was that most of the group that I was teaching were in fact Viet Cong.

03:30 The lieutenant that was supposedly captured by the Viet Cong and released, they were certain he was Viet Cong. So I thought, "I'm going to have this out – how am I going to do this?" Anyway the answer came a night or two later. The sergeants were up at the sergeants' mess with the guys that were looking after them and I had one of the drivers with me. I've got a driver but no jeep at this stage.

04:00 I looked up and there's the captain and the lieutenant and they're arguing with one of the soldiers. The soldier came running up to me and he said that the Dai Wee wanted to see me. I had a Smith & Wesson Chief Special pistol that the Yanks had given me. I used to keep it under my arm. I said to the driver, "We could be in trouble here. You just

04:30 put one up the spout of your SLR quietly and lay down there on the floor where they can't see you and you cover me. If I look like being in trouble just shoot both of them and I'll be responsible for what happens." He said, "This sounds a bit dramatic." I said, "It is and it could be. I reckon they're both bloody Viet Cong." He said, "Oh okay." So he did exactly as he was told and I went down and talked to these blokes.

05:00 They weren't happy at all and it was the topic that I was completely unprepared for. It was some grievance about digging weapons pits or something like that. It was something stupid, frivolous. I'm trying to signal to the driver with the rifle that's covering me that I'm all right. I wasn't sure whether he got the message or not so I just said to them, "Excuse me, Dai Wee, excuse me. I'll come back in a minute." So I ran back up the steps and I said,

05:30 "Unload it. Everything's all cool. It's all cool." As it turned out, I'm sure that these guys that are fair few of them are Viet Cong, but I found out later that the lieutenant definitely was. We did get a jeep in the end. I did let one of the warrant officers use the jeep to go up to – I can't remember the name of the place, there's a little town just north of us – he went up there one Saturday afternoon. The captain found out about it, he took the jeep

06:00 as soon as the warrant officer came back. He took the jeep and went to Saigon. And he came back the next day and I thought, do I go up to Colonel Tran Van Nhut and report a jeep that's missing that I don't know who owns and I haven't signed for it, whose is it? So I thought, let it go through to the keeper. Anyway fortunately next morning this guy comes back with a big smile on his face and I thought he was going to kiss me. He's saying –

06:30 that's thank you – "Come on Dai Wee," thank you captain, thank you Dai Wee, thank you. "I saw my wife and everything's marvellous and she's happy and the kids are doing all right." He said, "Now the punishment." And I thought, you're going to punish me? "No, you punish me. You reported the jeep stolen." I said, "No." And his eyes lit up and we were best of mates after that. Just amazing.

07:00 **How often in the time you spent in Vietnam did you suspect that ARVN were actually VC [Viet Cong] or sympathisers and that sort of thing?**

God. In the first time with 1 RAR we didn't have much to do with prisoners of war. On the second trip with 8 Battalion we used to take Hoi Cha and make them bushmen scouts and that was hopeless. I don't know how the Viet Cong ever did it, but the powers of persuasion they had over those

07:30 fellas was simply staggering because they'd do anything for them and we'd see them do anything. But when we've got them all they want to do is bum all – sorry, steal all the cigarettes that we had out of the

ration packs. They carry this sandbag of little packets of five cigarettes round for days on their shoulder. They'd shower. Every time it rained they'd jump out – in front of an ambush, they'd just jump out and wash themselves down in the rain and then jump back in again no trouble at all.

08:00 But they wouldn't work. They wouldn't do anything. They didn't want to know anyone. Just incredible. Now whether those blokes were VC or not I wouldn't trust them with Mum's apple pie. A lot of people trusted them. I couldn't see the real benefit of it. It's all right if you wanted to get information from them and to find out where things were. But I want to come back to why things are seen.

08:30 The American colonel that took over from Colonel Ivy was very impressed with the success that the Australian army had up there with finding the Viet Cong and the NVA. He couldn't work out the differences between the American system and theirs. And this is while I was on this training team. So he asked me if I'd go up and give a

09:00 lecture one afternoon to his officers. I said, "Yeah all right." He said, "Do you mind if the sergeants come too?" I said, "No. That's fine." So I started up and the way things are seen. The lesson goes, shape, shine, shadow, surface, silhouette and movement. They weren't impressed with that. So I said, "What do you teach that's different?"

09:30 They said, "No. We teach all that." I said, "Where's the difference?" They said, "Well that's what we're asking you now." I said, "The only thing I can think of is soil." They said, "What do you mean, soil?" I said, "You've got all these maps that we use. They're your maps and if Colonel O'Neill wanted to know where a unit would have to concentrate on we'd get the information to the SAS say or another battalion.

10:00 And if you're looking for a bunker complex, as I said before, they've got to find this basalt." So in Vietnam there's old alluvial which is like dirty grey sand, very fine grain – new alluvial, which is lighter in colour and the grains are coarser, but both useless for trying to make field defences unless you're going to be rivet it – like sand; and the good old basalt.

10:30 So we get the area where we wanted to go to do the operation or where we were told to go and I'd superimpose that over the soil map that the Yanks had given me. So wherever there was basalt I knew they could dig. Wherever there was rainforest they've got shelter and cover from view. Wherever there's a junction of three small creeks into a bigger creek something that you can

11:00 pick up from the ground when you're walking – so if you strike a creek and you know the creek's going to run north south and you're heading to east from west, you strike that. If you follow it south you're going to come to another creek junction and that's where the complex is going to be so they can find their way home. A lot of people thought that the Viet Cong had radio sets and all this stuff to burn, but they didn't. I could go on for hours about all the ambushing techniques we had up on that 89 northing.

11:30 I think that a lot of the success we had was attributable to the fact that they didn't have good communications. They had a workshop somewhere to our east that the SAS used to talk about and possibly they used to have people take all the stuff for repairs across that way. But if you had that combination of the basalt and the creeks

12:00 and then you'd look for sign like the animal tracks that I said before and little snares and marks that they just bend a twig to shape the arrow going that way or they'd leave marks in the ground – things that you couldn't see – or up in the trees. You had to have eyes everywhere. They're pretty resourceful characters.

How hard is it to tune yourself into those little Vietnamese tricks?

To teach a forward scout things like that – those froward scouts, don't know how they did it, but they've either got it or they haven't.

12:30 It's like dressing a bloke to take a smart looking chick out to dinner. You can spend a thousand dollars to buy him a good suit, a shirt and a tie and beaut shoes and everything. Put one bloke in it, he's the part. He's away, Rudolph Vaselino, off he goes. The other bloke looks like – we talk about bad hair day – you know he's not going to make it. So the forward scouts are the same. Some of them can pick up all this stuff. Some of them can do exactly what they're taught.

13:00 You don't look at the jungle. You've got to look through it. That's something I can't do. But some of the young blokes could really do it. They'd put up the old stop sign and go and have a look and sure enough. There are a lot of things to look for too. Especially in the first trip. They had these crude Claymore mines we used to call them. They were round like a car wheel

13:30 and made of brass or something – copper. They'd fill them with old boots, Mum's toilet gear, anything they could find, I suppose. They'd put them up in a tree so they could direction them onto the track that we would walk along. They'd either be through a trip or a command detonator. And the other thing they had in 1965

14:00 were the black powder mines. They'd hang them from a tree and someone'd trip a trip wire and the black powder mine would come down and get them right below the waist and burn them. That was pretty nasty. They had lots of tricks. Lots of signs, lots of things to learn and a very short space of time

14:30 to learn it. But I think the basic infantry skills that we were taught in Australia before we went away like you don't go home the way you went out because you could get ambushed on the way back; if the tracks there you follow the track, you don't walk along it; always look for the unexpected and treat everything as suspect. The other pressure that forward scouts are under – if you've got to cover

15:00 a certain amount of ground in a certain amount of time, poor devils, this bloke says there's something in me, a sixth sense that's saying we should check this out boss and then the other bloke's up there saying, come on we've got to go. And the other lesson is, when you cross open ground always own the far side before you commit your troops to crossing it. Colonel Bunfield was switched on. He used to walk us through paddy fields. It used to upset us sometimes.

15:30 But when the blokes are carrying the mortars and everything all the equipment's very heavy and especially if you've got to stop. Around eleven o'clock in the morning in the middle of a paddy fields that's up to your hocks in water, that's not a good place to be. The other thing is, you hear the Viet Cong firing at you on either side, but the average range for small arms is say six hundred metres.

16:00 You have a look at your map and you count your map squares and he's got you right in the middle. So it works that it's about one thousand four hundred metres across. He had it all worked out. Good bloke.

Did you blokes go to JTC [Jungle Training Course] at Canungra before you went over?

I was almost lucky. 1 Battalion didn't go and – a lot of this sucks – some of the companies might have been that I didn't know about, but we just didn't have time and we just went. This is another thing

16:30 about the sergeants I was talking about before. The training that those guys had put us in really good stead. And the fact that we'd been a family for so long. It was just the younger fellas coming up. So that really helped us. But 8 Battalion – when we went with 2 Troop RAE [Royal Australian Engineers] the first time to Malaya, 2 Troop did Canungra but I didn't. I joined them late, thank god. So I missed out. So I missed out with 1. But when 8 RAR went I

17:00 almost made it and I thought, three out of three, good kit. Nothing wrong with JTC. It's just I didn't want to go. I mentioned Ben Murphy before, ACA Company. When we were in Malaya Ben and I we got on pretty good. He was a major and I was a captain but we didn't mix socially much but I'd been to his place a couple of times. When I was ops [Operations] officer in 8 RAR in the CP –

17:30 that's in Malaya, not Vietnam, I used to really look after the soldiers cause I was a soldier myself before. A private soldier. And anything that they ever wanted or the companies wanted for them I used to make sure they got it; or that was asked for, and I'd follow the request right through and I'd let the company commander know exactly what the status of every request was right till it ended till the soldier got it. Major Murphy was of similar mind and we got on really well.

18:00 Anyway I'm the intelligence officer at Enoggera and he just got A company and one afternoon Colonel O'Neill called me into his office and he said, "Keith, Major Murphy speaks very highly of you," and I said, "And I he, sir," and he said, "Well we'll just see in a minute." He said, "Major Murphy has to go and do a course and you're the only officer that he'll let take A company through Canungra." "Oh thanks, Ben." So I took

18:30 8 company 8 RAR through Canungra. But the training there was good. The soldiers didn't grizzle much. We were left to our own devices a bit. The actual training itself while we did the right thing and everything was correct there wasn't a lot of interference. The food was superb. The administration was excellent. Yeah. it was all worthwhile.

19:00 But again I could never see the – "Me?" Anyway they got me in the end.

Did you ever feel like there was any part of the training that the soldiers had done that didn't quite prepare them for what they came to face in Vietnam?

Doesn't matter how good you are and it doesn't mater how good and recent your history is.

19:30 But I think most of the lessons that the soldiers from the Second World War learnt in New Guinea and Borneo stood us in good stead. I think the lessons that the fellas learnt in Korea also helped us but not to the same degree with jungle fighting. And I think the army says, keep it simple stupid, and it's no good trying to make a soldier –

20:00 it's not good trying to teach him to be a soldier and then load all this extra stuff on him. Just keep it simple and say that's what you've got to learn, that's what you've got to be, that's what you've got to do, this is what we're going to face and we think that everything we've taught you is going to help you to get there. That's what I've always felt about it and I haven't been left down. I think our training – I said, I'm that proud – our training's been marvellous.

How much did the blokes gain out of Malaya

20:30 **before going to Vietnam?**

A lot. This is where 1 RAR was so lucky. 2 RAR went to Malaya first, '57 to '59. No, '55 to '57. 3 RAR went '57, '59 and 1 RAR relieved us on the Flaminia. They did '59 to '61 then they came home and 1

RAR was the first battalion to go. And of course they split us all up. The

21:00 backbone of 1 RAR were real great guys, they were really well trained. If you look through all of those that received decorations in Vietnam. The VC [Victoria Cross] – like Dasher Wheatley, was a soldier with 3 RAR, that Sungai Sekit- I've got a photo of him in there. And he

21:30 ended up one of our platoon sergeants and he gets a VC with the two grenade trick. He wasn't lonely. There's a lot of those fellas there that I reckon saved a lot of young lives. It wasn't just training. It was their professionalism as well. I think there's another thing in 1 RAR I saw it more than anywhere else – the love of that battalion.

22:00 Breaks your heart to leave it. I think the thing that saves the Royal Australian Regiment later on that the nucleus of most of the battalions that you went to like 8 RAR for example, that was made up of a lot of 1 RAR officers. We were all kindred spirits, all brothers, we all knew each other, knew our wives, the kids, the lot. You all trusted – trust, that's the thing. Confidence and trust. To go to war without that wouldn't be nice at all.

22:30 **How does that spirit build, how does it evolve?**

From the top down. If the old man, the CO, is a Bunfield or an O'Neill or a Townsend or a Waugh, those blokes, and I can even talk about the

23:00 Second World War, the Pikes and all those blokes that commanded the 2/17th battalion and all that at Tobruk, the way the soldiers speak of them even today and I think if the CO and the regimental sergeant major get on I think that's the magic. If they respect each other and trust each other

23:30 and can talk to each other openly, man to man, I think that's the secret and it goes down the line from there. The example that the RSM sets to the soldiers, the example that the CO sets to his officers, and that inculcates a feeling of – the company commander's a major and the company sergeant major is a warrant officer second class, and if they get on – they don't have to marry each other or kiss behind the showers or anything of this, but if they

24:00 can be man to man and circumspect and talk honestly to each other and one's not a boofhead and the other's not an idiot. I had a bloke, Warrant Officer Woodley, we were up in Townsville and he was ex SAS and I used to say to him, "Doesn't matter what happens

24:30 or what time of day it is, if we disagree about anything we don't go into an office and talk to each other, we'll walk out there and we'll sit on the side of the parade ground," – it had a concrete curb around it – "We'll sit there so the whole company can see us and we'll just talk it through." And it never came to that, but that's the sort of thing. And the soldiers all knew. There was never any backbiting.

25:00 I'm not saying it didn't exist at all, but from what I saw. And the trust and the respect. And the platoon sergeants. And the platoon commanders. You get a platoon commander straight out of Portsea or Duntroon and in those days from Skyville, the national service blokes – and I tell you what, anyone that says national servicemen were no good, he doesn't know Weetbix from onions. Those fellas they were just wonderful. They fitted in and as long as you treated them

25:30 same as everyone else – that's all they asked – and their officers were just as good. They just fitted in remarkably well. If they had a fault, you'd say, "That's your fault, you'd want to fix that up," and they'd come back and say, "Is that better now?" Or they mightn't talk to you for a year, but you could see it's changed. And then you got the section commanders and their relationship to the soldiers.

26:00 And in the old days when people used to do the biffo trick – you know if you didn't do as you're told they'd take you round the back and whack, well, I don't know if it still goes on or not and I'm not saying it didn't go on in our day, but I didn't tolerate it. I wouldn't. I still don't. But if the corporal's no good, the diggers'll soon let you know. And if the digger's no good, the corporal will soon let you know. And it comes to a selection process. When you're a company commander

26:30 and you're sitting at Townsville or wherever it is behind this beaut desk, the company sergeant major brings in these new recruits or blokes that are reinforcing your battalion, you just say, "Thank you sergeant major," and he puts all their personal files on your table. You don't even open them. Well I didn't. You don't touch them and you just look at the bloke, ask him a few questions and you think he's going to fit – not with you, but with the fellas, so fine.

27:00 And if you don't, you've got the slightest doubt in your mind and you don't really need him and he's needed somewhere else, no, you just don't. And then it works. Just after the war in Townsville B Company 2/4th battalion, so there's a fair bit of time gone from the end of the Vietnam War, we had a CO called Lenny Johnson, another great man.

27:30 He'd just come back from staff college with the United States Marines at Quantico. And he said to me, "B company" – my company – "you'll be the first company in the battalion. You'll be the advance party if ever we go anywhere and I can tell you now we're on standby." Things weren't looking real good in Israel at this stage. So I got the company sergeant major and the

28:00 CQMS [Company Quartermaster Sergeant] – the staff sergeant runs the store – got them together and

the 2IC I had and I said for the soldiers sake, not ours, “If there’s going to be a blue let’s be the first to go. So if we accept now that we want to go and we want to be first and we all agree on that?” And they were all, “Yeah.” I said, “All right, we’ll do it the hard way. I want all our war stores, everything done the right way it’s supposed to be done.

28:30 I don’t care how we do it, we’re going to do it. All the wills done and everything ready that you have to do to get ready for pre-embarkation. We’ll have everything done except the pre-embarkation leave because you can’t do that.” These guys all knew what they had to do and they just went away and did it. To cut a long story short, we were up in high range at the back of Townsville, north, and the CO got to me on the radio and he said, “The brigadier’s going to be

29:00 with you in half an hour. I’ll be with him. He’s going to ask you some questions. I’ve already given him what I think the answer’s going to be, but he’s going to ask you.” I said, “All right.” I had a batman called Jimmy Mitra. No one else had wanted Jimmy. He was an Indian. And he had contact lenses. In the field he wasn’t useless but he wasn’t the best infantry soldier I’ve ever seen. But because I took him on and he kept his stripe – because he had a family to support –

29:30 he thought I was pretty good and I thought he was pretty good and he spoilt me rotten. Anyway here we are out in the bush and I said, “Corporal Mitra, the brigadier will be with us in twenty minutes.” “Okay.” And away he went. The brigadier arrived. Corporal Mitra comes up and he’s got two ration tin lids. On one there’s sweat rags cut in half. Two of them, on this tray, are cold.

30:00 Wet and cold. And two on this side are hot and the steams coming off them. And he offers it to the brigadier and the colonel and they… Then he comes back with the mugs of tea and the two ration tins lids again – same two rations tin lids I suppose with Jatz crackers and smoked oysters on them. The brigadier’s eyes nearly fell out of his head. He said to Lenny Johnson, “How often does this go on?” And Lenny said, “All the time I believe.”

30:30 And he said to me, “I suppose you’ve heard there’s trouble in Israel?” I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “All right. If I was to say to you now we’re going to take your company as the advance party of 2/4th Battalion to Israel, how long would you need from when you get back to the Lavarack Barracks?” I said, “Half an hour, sir.

31:00 Provided you can get me the first line information from the ordnance stores magazine. If they can marry up with me at Garbutt Air Force Base, that’s all I want. The only other help I’d need would be the medical stuff if you can get that to me some way. And maps.” And Lenny Johnson looked at him and he said, “I told you.” Anyway it was going to be on.

31:30 But for some reason it didn’t happen.

For the sake of people that might be hearing this in a few years or whatever can you just quickly explain what was going on in Israel at the time?

It’s the same as always with the Seven Day War and Yom Kippur and all those sort of things. They had an emergency and the United Nations were involved and sometimes there the United Nations couldn’t hold and they needed reinforcement so they were going to send an infantry battalion over there to help them.

32:00 That was Australia’s commitment to it. And about a month later a similar thing happened. It wasn’t exactly the same, but Michael Somare was in trouble in New Guinea, the prime minister, and were asking for Australians to help them. They briefed me, but they didn’t tell me what it was. But that didn’t come off either. But at least the soldiers knew that myself and all of the warrant officers

32:30 and the NCOs had done our best to get them a trip away. It pays, doesn’t it? They’re just great guys.

What effect does it have if blokes are in the starting blocks and they never get to go?

Disappointment. I don’t think the wives are too disappointed. I was disappointed and I know the company was. What’s to be will be. But you’re

33:00 soldiers. You just do as you’re told. But I think that professionalism and that eagerness and that will to win, I want to go, that’s the stuff. If the soldiers see all that – and this business of traipsing through the woods in the rain day in and night out, night after night and all this sort of stuff and being taken away from home to do this and that with no real end to it – with no purpose – the CO really has to have

33:30 a good understanding of his soldiers and what his problems are and how he overcomes it. It’s interesting to see the way they do it. None of those COs ever let any of the battalions down. That way. Not any way. But particularly in training.

The flip side of the esprit de corps that you explained, is there a flip side where you see little things happen that just bring everybody down?

I think the day that – I wasn’t there, I was at home –

34:00 but when Lou Brumfield had to leave 1 RAR and I knew that Lou wasn’t all that flash for a while, but I didn’t think they’d bring him home. But the battalion thought that Mal Lander, another great guy, would

have taken over 1 Battalion and Mal had to go and do staff college or something. Now, Mal Lander could run rings around anyone. I think –

34:30 it's vague now, but I'm pretty sure that's the way the story went. And they brought in Colonel Priest and I've never met Colonel Priest, but from what I understand, if he hadn't been the calibre of man that he is he would have had a terrible time. It's like a family losing a father. I think that hurts

35:00 When the soldiers see people getting killed and injured and the futility of it all seems to strike home, for a long while soldiers waddle around out there in the jungle and it's like car accidents here –

35:30 it happens to everybody else, but not to you. It's like when you have a death in your own family. You seem so distant, removed, but until it touches you it's not nice and soldiers don't like things that aren't nice because there's a lot of things that can upset them. It takes a real good leader to get them pumped up from that.

36:00 I think the other thing that keeps their spirits up is each other. There's no thieves. No stealing. You can leave everything where it is and no one ever takes anything. Not that you've got much. But you come back and everything's in its place. I found it very hard to adjust to civilian life, the way people treat each other, no respect for anything. People

36:30 enter other people's homes, their cars, businesses. And it's completely alien to an infantry soldier. It's just not done, not ever thought of. I think the leadership training that we had and all the lessons have been passed down to us – as I said, all this experience is there and if an individual is having a problem

37:00 he just goes to someone else and asks how do you get around this? And the answer's there.

Apart from that experience in training that you talked about, what about the gear that you guys had there?

In Malaya it was Mickey Mouse. Everything was made by the British Army. We had natural brown jungle boots which were next to useless, but they didn't fall off your feet. They made your feet sweat but your feet were

37:30 wringing wet all the time anyway. The grey socks were good, but they shrank very quickly. The jungle green trousers and shirts that we had were good and they issued us with a flannel shirt. And you think that sounds silly, but flannel when it's wet's very cool. You weren't encouraged to wear that in the jungle though all the time. Some of us used to carry it and wear it in the night. It had a long tail on it like a nightshirt. They gave us brown hockey boots to wear overnight. So you take the wet socks off and

38:00 dry your feet, powder them and put these hockey boots on and they were handy when you did picket of a night.

With socks or without socks?

It all depended on the individual. It was still hot of a night out there in the jungle. Except if it's raining and the wind's blowing. The hats were functional. The sweat rags were good. The webbing was excellent. The weapons were good. The ammunition never failed us.

38:30 The grenades were good. The vehicles were good. All the accommodation was good. The food was murder. The ration packs. Thank god they got us Australian ration packs. That was one thing that saved us. Vietnam with 1 RAR the first trip in '65 they issued us with boots AB – ammunition boots – TS – tropical

39:00 studded. They had a date of 1942 I think stamped on them. Gaiters Aust. Australian designed gaiters like the Yanks wore only they had a strap that went round your instep and another strap midway, another strap at the top. We took three paces from the helicopter on our initial deployment into war zone D.

39:30 And the soles came off our boots. I'm not lying. The soles actually sucked off our boots. And we walked around with these gaiter straps and our socks. Bloody disconcerting. The trousers were all right and the shirts. The first thing you noticed, the buttons came off our shirts. Then the sleeves

40:00 would come away. The webbing we had was the stuff that our fathers had worn in New Guinea and Tobruk. '39 patent I think they called it. And we had some pre-Vietnam issue of American combat packs with the braces and the American

40:30 belt, American water bottle and the cups canteen. I think we still had our own pan set messing, you know the big and small tin, knife fork and spoon set. They were all right. Our big pack was the pack from the Second World War and although it didn't look flash it did the job. Never fell to bits on us or anything. It did the job and we were used to it. Used to hook up the same

41:00 pattern basic pouches. So they had clips up the top and they'd clip in to your pack and give you support. We had entrenching tools that were that heavy and cumbersome. When you wore them it wasn't so great when you were out there trying to dig a hole. So I made my pioneers hoik them and we had shovels, RE, round end and short handled. We used to carry them on our back.

41:30 The hootchie itself was a – we'd gone from a capes half shelter like a raincoat, like a gas cape, to a long rectangular sheet of some sort of plasticky material. And that was very good. We could hook two of them together and make a hootchie.

Tape 7

00:40 At Blackhorse, Tran Van Nhut, the CO, the responsibility he had for not only his soldiers but all of the dependents that lived inside the containment itself, he knew the position he was in all the time and he knew that the Viet Cong shared that area

01:00 with his soldiers. He knew when to pull his soldiers in and not take them out. That's of the containment itself. He used to go out of a night sometimes to shoot deer with a crossbow to augment the rations that they had there. One afternoon and Private Sleep was with me and it was about the time

01:30 I just told you about the eighteen Viet Cong and the crossover. Just south of Blackhorse there's a wooden bridge. It crossed a not very deep stream and it was on route two so it was pretty vital. Anyway for some reason it had blown up or it was damaged and they couldn't use it so they put a detour through

02:00 there through the Courtney Rubber Estate. This afternoon the colonel called me in and he introduced me to two fellows in dark suits – pretty classy suits, white shirts, ties, polished shoes and socks – socks weren't polished, but the shoes were. And a fabulous looking Vietnamese woman.

02:30 She could have been a model from anywhere. Beautiful. Dressed in a tailored gabardine suit. Nylon stockings, high heel shoes, the whole works. It's so out of character for a place like Blackhorse. Anyway, he said to me that they were people from the international Red Cross. So I was supposed to believe that so I said, "Yeah. Fair enough."

03:00 He said, "They've got a three ton truck outside and tomorrow morning that truck full of goods is to go down to a village as a gift from the Red Cross." But it was in Phuoc Tuy province, not Long Khanh, which is Phuoc Tuy was out. Would I arrange with Colonel O'Neill to give that vehicle safe passage to that village once it crosses in to the Australian's area of responsibility –

03:30 namely Phuoc Tuy province and as I've explained the two northern two thousand metres that he'd give us for 8 Battalion to use was Long Khanh province. So I said, "Yeah. All right." So I went back and sent in clear what the colonel had said and asked for. Colonel O'Neill came back to me later and he said, "Yes. That's fine. Provided it's all finished before twelve o'clock tomorrow."

04:00 So I told the colonel and he thanked me. I went straight over and I talked to Colonel Ivy, the American colonel that had the infantry battalion there because I knew he had his own Iroquois helicopter. I told him about the interview and what had just occurred. The look on Tran Van Nhut's face. I said to Colonel Ivy, "I think I'm in pretty deep water here. I can't handle this on my own.

04:30 I just can't embarrass Colonel Tran Van Nhut because if everything's real and I squawk and say that it's what I think it is and it gets back to him it could be embarrassing." And Colonel Ivy said, "Well you tell me and I'll take the responsibility for it." So I said, "I think that they're Viet Cong or NVA and they're trying to get safe passage for their troops down. Since that bridge has been blown out they've got to go through the rubber

05:00 and they know that 8 Battalion 's in there." "Oh. Okay. What do you want to do?" "I offered Colonel Tran Van Nhut to have a platoon of your soldiers there at eight o'clock tomorrow morning and escort them down to the Australian soldiers where they could escort the vehicle to the village." He said, "Okay, that's good. Fine." So I go out and have a look at half past seven the next morning and there's no

05:30 vehicle there. It's gone. So I ran back and told Colonel Ivy. He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Let's get in the chopper and we'll go and have a look and see if we can see it." So we get in the chopper and away we go. There's only the two pilots, Colonel Ivy and myself. And the two door gunners. When we flew over the detour – it's a real bright sunny day

06:00 and the rubber's pretty sparse, rubber trees, you can see through and you can see the ground very easily and you can see the track of the detour road. There's the truck and I'd say there was thirty fellas in black – that's VC – and about thirty fellas in khaki – that's North Vietnamese Army – unloading the truck. They stood perfectly still and all looked up. He said, "Will we get stuck into them?" With the machine guns on the doors. I said, "No. I don't know where

06:30 our 8 RAR fellas are," because they were all ambushing there and I knew that they'd be pretty close by. Anyway he said, "What do we do?" I said, "I'm not going to get on the radio or anything but we just fly straight down and we'll see Colonel O'Neill," and we went down and told Colonel O'Neill what I've just told you. I don't know. They reacted – either Major Mick Jeffery

07:00 or one of the companies, they reacted to it and they actually got most of the stuff back. They didn't see any of the North Vietnamese or the South Vietnamese, but they'd stockpiled the stuff and they didn't

have time to put it in cages and hide it. We recovered a mortar and hands across the ocean stuff that the American aid program provided – like four gallon kerosene tins, a square tin, and they were full of milk powder and stuff like that.

07:30 But there was enough provisions there to keep a sizable unit going for some time. It doesn't come home to you really when you live in a place like Blackhorse the amount of weight that must have been on Colonel Tran Van Nhut's shoulders. Just being told by the Viet Cong what he could and couldn't do and to play the part and give Colonel O'Neill the concessions that he did.

08:00 I don't know what's happened to him, but for a very quiet private sort of man, with the responsibility he had, he didn't show it. I really respected him. It's entirely alien to us. You don't harbour those things yourself. You go to your superior commander. But I think the fellas in the training team would know more about intrigue and things like that that went on than what

08:30 we did. It's just disappointing. And as that Vietnamese captain said to me, "The Vietnam War's gone on for a long time. You only see a year of it or two years. We're here for a real long time and things have to happen our way." But I think when a nation is placed in a position of having to

09:00 eke out a living under a corrupt government, or a government that they feel is corrupt, who doesn't have their best interest at heart, and you can look at Idi Amin and all these guys and what happened in Uganda and Rwanda today and all the displaced refugees and who looks after who. Cambodia wasn't much better. Laos wasn't much better. Look at Burma today. All those guys had neighbours.

09:30 As I said, Tran Van Nhut was a province chief over near Cambodia, near the Parrots Bridge, in his earlier days. But it is disappointing to think that your allies are people that you're trying to help have to live that way and hide things. And yet the French rubber tappers down at Binh Ba gave us information and everything. Later I served with the 25th US

10:00 Infantry Division and the chief of staff was a Colonel Whitelaw – a bird colonel, a full colonel – gorgeous guy. He'd been around. There was a thing called the Firestone Trail. Keith Quinn, Tony Quinn was the LO [Liaison Officer] that used to go up there. We used to do a week and change over. What they'd done, the Firestone Trail was made out –

10:30 first they put defoliant on the jungle – this Agent Orange – they sprayed it with C130s and killed everything off. They they got bulldozers with chains between them and they pulled all the vegetation down. You know a sand tennis court that you see? You know what I'm talking about, the sandy surface ones? It looked like a mile wide tennis court. It mightn't have been a mile wide, but it was almost a thousand metres I reckon. I don't know how long it was but it was like

11:00 infinity. You couldn't see the end of it either way, east or west. They got bulldozers and gouged big holes in the ground like long trenches. They took containers, shipping containers that you see on the road going from seaports on the back of semis, they took them and they placed them in the bottom of the trench end to end with a space along the middle

11:30 to make a walkway and they put this pure steel plank that I was telling you about before over the top of that, then sandbags and then covered it and you wouldn't know it was there. There was a couple of radio antennas that they've remoted. They've had underground cables going to trees on the northern side that I saw. There might have been others. And you wouldn't know this place was there. So your helicopter lands, you get out of the helicopter and the helicopter disappears and this fellow comes out

12:00 from under the ground and takes you down. You've got a bunk. We had our own container. All the containers were offices. They had a little kitchen set up. It took a whole divisional headquarters staff in it. Just amazing. Of course the Viet Cong knew we were there.

12:30 They used to mortar us of a night mainly, sometimes during the day, and all the dust would come down and out of the walls and it'd get in your teeth and your eyes and your ears and in your food. I'm claustrophobic and sometimes you'd want to run out of there. Those guys lived like that for I don't know how long.

13:00 But Keith – well Tony Quin his name is – Tony and I did about three stints each I think and then that was enough for me. But those guys went to the Parrot's Booth into Cambodia. They were the first lot in there. They offered to take me with them but I said it just wasn't practical. I had to get permission for a start and I didn't think Colonel O'Neill would let me go in there. What was the use? It was no value

13:30 to the battalion. It would have been good for me, but anyway. But he said to me, "I hate wasting things. I know we waste a lot of stuff, but all the stuff that I leave behind is yours and if you can get it back to 8 Battalion , good luck to you." And he sat a near new jeep full of petrol and everything, poncho liners, 250 calibre machine guns,

14:00 the ammunition for them, a few other odds and ends. They had one Iroquois helicopter, an HD, and these later helicopters could take a lot more than the five soldiers. I think I've seen fourteen all up on it. Anyway the chopper came and I was on my own standing there in the middle of the

14:30 Firestone Trail. The 25th US Infantry Division had gone to Cambodia and it was another long wait I had waiting for this chopper to come. I had the jeep all prepared in case they couldn't lift it or we couldn't

get a Chinook or anything. I told the pilot what the situation was when he came and he said, “No. I can take the 250 machine guns,” or one of them, I just forget. Anyway we fitted them on but I had to burn the jeep, set fire to it.

15:00 But that was good for 8 Battalion because we could set up the fifty cal and that meant we could take one of our other GPMGs out patrolling with us. I often wonder how those fellas got on. Cambodia wasn’t really nice either I don’t think. From what I heard.

Can you just – in telling me that story you mentioned something that we briefly spoke about earlier and I meant to ask you about – for people that might not know,

15:30 **can you just explain how and why they used the defoliant?**

Okay. A jungle is a jungle and you can’t see through it. It’s very friendly or unfriendly – whichever way you look at it. To us Australians it’s very friendly. When it rains green looks black and black looks black. Bob Loftus who I just talked to you about, one day in 1965 actually waved to the group going the other way thinking

16:00 it was 1 RAR troops, but he realised, there’s no one else hear. And the Viet Cong waved back. And they got stuck into each other. So there you are. Bob was black because of the rain and they were black because they were dressed in black. But the American idea was to make it so they could see through it. So to give them less area to patrol. So what they did,

16:30 they got this Agent Orange and it was shipped from somewhere – I don’t know where, but they must have had more than one source – to a central spot and not necessarily Saigon, I don’t know. It’d have to be where there was a major airforce base that could take C130 aircraft be it Bien Hoa or one of the other ones up north. I don’t know how far reaching the program went, whether it went right up to the DMZ [Demilitarised Zone] or not,

17:00 but they used to fly over us in the C130s just like a real fine misty rain. They’d pump it in land rovers. They’d go round in the jeeps or trucks and trailers and pump it and spray it onto things. And I believe they did it in water craft as well up the rivers and eventually it kills off all the

17:30 foliage. That’s why it’s called a defoliant. I took Sonia back to Vietnam about three or four years ago for a holiday with her brother and everywhere we went you could see the effects of this defoliant, the way it killed off all the trees, and it’s only just now that they can grow other crops in there with some success. But it was a very expensive and a very big program that was ongoing

18:00 for a long time. Ranchand I think they called it was the title of it. It affected a lot of people. The Vietnamese still today claim there’s deformities of the children that have been born whose parents or parent had come in contact with it. It affected a lot of the Australian soldiers. I heard an argument once from farmers and the farmers said, “This is all baloney.

18:30 We used a lot of these things and we never get anything wrong with us.” But a farmer that lives on a farm, provided he’s not in a drought area, usually unless he doesn’t tub, can go and have a bath that night and take his clothes off and Mum comes out and washes them for him and he puts the clean clothes on. Well, cases like Private Sleep where you’re in those pants until the resupply comes again – five days – the other thing with 8 Battalion,

19:00 sometimes there we might do three resupplies. That’s fifteen days that the guys don’t have a shower. So if you’ve been affected, sprayed with it or sat in it or come in contact with it, that’s on your body for fifteen days and that’s not normal. Very unpleasant stuff and there’s arguments still going on today about Agent Orange.

19:30 Or 24T or something like that they call it. I forget what the farmers call it.

When you’re telling us about Private Sleep before, the incident where he was in the weapons pit and you made him go and change as quickly as he could – does it have an immediate effect on him?

It burns. The misty stuff doesn’t seem to. I can’t remember much. But when you sit in it it’s like the effect of kerosene I

20:00 guess but later on the guys come out in terrible rashes and itches. A lot of blokes are affected differently by it. It’s not a pleasant thing. In our day we didn’t know enough about it so it was normal so you didn’t worry about it. It’s like finding out now that butter’s bad for you and sugar’s bad for you and salt’s bad for you and stuff like that. You use something else.

20:30 Or the blockout that you’re using’s not adequate.

But the stories about Agent Orange for my generation are things that we hear about like when vets have been fighting and years down the track the after effects of it so I was curious to find out at the time how common it was that people were affected and how serious it was at the time.

It was something we didn’t take much notice of. See, the other thing is, if you’re wet from sweat

21:00 and you're wet from rain – Vietnam's not a comfortable place. You rot everywhere. Some of us still suffer from tinea. Blokes had crutch rot and rot under their arms. And even in Malaya we used to get monsoon blisters under your arms. And when you used other people's equipment like life jackets

21:30 and things when you were doing watermanship – we used to go to a place, Luboxiginta, north of Sungai Petani which I was talking about before. We'd do watermanship training there and because of the perspiration on everyone and you changed from life jacket to life jacket, unit to unit. The British Army'd use it before us. You'd come up with these terrible things and they had to use some balsam like a – Whitfield Ointment it was. Thank God for Mister Whitfield. You'd put that on. It was terrible.

22:00 The other thing you can notice today – colour photos particular of 8 Battalion. The fellas that have been in areas where there's laterite, their clothes are a reddy brown, not jungle green. That doesn't allow the material to breathe at all.

22:30 It's not a comfortable thing at all. And you daydream about a shower or a hot bath. I used to have – had a sergeant called Peter Buckney in 8 Battalion D company. Donny Juillerat was the company sergeant major and one of the platoon commanders – something happened and Donny Juillerat took his platoon. I think we were right up north near Long Khanh

23:00 and it was in the wet season, pouring rain of a night and Peter Buckney and I used to sit back to back – we wouldn't lie down. And your rifle's got one up spout and the safety's off and your fingers on the trigger and you rely on each other and when he's asleep I'm awake and when I'm asleep he's awake. You just nudge each other as little signals. And all you've got on is this one raincoat, a camouflage raincoat, and this little hat. It's

23:30 pouring rain and the water table is very high at the best of times and all this water's just all around you everywhere. You get a little log that's only three inches round and you try and find one each and you sit there so you're even back to back. And that's how you spend the night. I used to dream about Sonia and I could envision a lounge, a really nice warm loungeroom, and Sonia's got a dressing gown on and she's handing me this hot cup of cocoa.

24:00 Why it's cocoa I'll never know, but that's what it was. I was never game to wake up. Like I said before when you go on R & R you don't know whether you're up there dreaming you're home or home dreaming you're up there. And I never wanted the dream to end. I didn't want to wake up and find I was in Vietnam. I wanted to wake up and find I was home in this beaut loungeroom with Sonia. That was never the case. You'd wake up and you're back to back with poor old Peter Buckney. Geez that was hard. It's funny the things your body can withstand and

24:30 the guys that did the Second World War, they did it too and they did it for long periods. The blokes in Burma, the blokes on the Kokoda Trail. And in contact with the enemy all the time and short on rations, no comforts and no shelter, wringing wet all the time. Not good. I think that's something else that makes us younger blokes so proud of the World War II fellas and the World War I blokes. Particularly

25:00 when you read Bryce Courtenay's book – the trilogy that he wrote about The Potato Factory and in then Tommo and Hawk and in Solomon's Song. In Solomon's Song he writes chapters to the Anzacs when they landed and the conditions that they put up with there and the description of that and you can actually taste and smell what Bryce Courtenay's describing to you in the book. Just magic stuff. John Masters wrote another book about the River Lancers and their involvement in

25:30 the First World War in France and the conditions that they lived in. Soldiers have all got things in common, all in varying degrees. It's just unfortunate that the Vietnam fellas weren't thought of and the Korean blokes weren't thought of the same way as the First and Second World War blokes were thought of. The Second World War blokes complained that the First World War bloke didn't think much of them.

26:00 It's a generational thing. No-one can be held responsible for the year of their birth. We've all got to do what we've got to do and it's a matter of time. The time that this all happens to us in. I just hope that everybody realises that just because there's been arguments in the past the respect is always there and soldiers that have been soldiers, that have lived like that, can understand and appreciate what our forebears did

26:30 and what the fellas that have come after us are doing – the fellas in Timor and blokes over in Iran and Afghanistan now. Things aren't really polite for them. It's tough. We appreciate them. It's just tolerance and you accept the other bloke,

27:00 accept his views, listen to what he has to say and he can't help when he was born. I think if the RSL in particular had been more on the side of the Vietnam fellas when they came home the RSL would be in a better position than it is today and we wouldn't have all these fragmented Vietnam veteran associations. I think unless the veteran community stays or gets under one umbrella the lobbying

27:30 capacity that we have's going to dissipate rapidly and we'll all end up on the banana boat to nowhere. After I left 8 Battalion I went to 1 ARU [Australian Reinforcement Unit], a reinforcement unit. Co-located almost, it was just next door to 8 Battalion. They made me operations officer there.

28:00 That was interesting. I could teach the reinforcements all about his intelligence skills that Colonel O'Neill had taught me and I put them into them. We had some unfortunate things happen and blokes

killed, blokes badly wounded, and it just makes you wonder why?

28:30 And the other young fellas going across to their units unscathed. It's just a funny lot how things happen to some and not to others and the lessons we try and teach people and you wonder why that was necessary and why did you do it this way, and how come someone else didn't see how unsafe something is when you can see it.

On that – the story that you told us earlier about the APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and the minefield and you had clearance

29:00 **with the colonel, had you run into him after that?**

I'm not a hundred percent sure but I think Mal Peck and I took D company down to Peter Badcoe club at Vung Tau for an R & R and Mal and I because we're both married we stayed at the Badcoe Club and we bought a bottle of champagne each and stood in the pool, tried to drink it, but our tummies had shrunk and we couldn't. We were both that exhausted.

29:30 I think it was still sunlight when we went to bed and didn't wake up till next morning. But I'd been into Vung Tau itself and I'm sure I saw that colonel running like an officers' billet or a hotel where the American soldiers stayed. I thought it was him, but your mind plays tricks on you after a while and you don't know whether it's what you wished on that fellow to happen or whether it did. But I'm pretty sure it's a fact

30:00 that he'd lost his unit and gone down there. At 1 ARU something happened and we had a really bad accident and got two blokes killed and a lot of blokes wounded. A couple of days later we just had a memorial service for them. I had a family emergency at home. This is the quality of leaders.

30:30 A fellow called Bill Henderson, the brigadier in charge of the task force at the time, he sent a message to me and said he was sorry for what had happened and that he reckoned I'd done enough time up there and within minutes a land rover backed into my tent, physically into the tent, and there were two soldiers got off the land rover and they packed all my gear. The orderly room came down with all my paperwork and everything. I was in the land rover and off to

31:00 Luscombe, the airstrip we had there. This is all within an hour. At Luscombe they had a Polartis Porter on standby for me. They put me and my gear in, flew me to Ton San Nhut. They'd held up a Qantas 707 that was either an R & R flight or taking soldiers back home. They held that up for me. Put me on. Put my gear inside. Flew me home. I was home that same day virtually.

31:30 Just amazing bloke. I sorted everything out and they made me two three air at the Vic Barracks as I said. This day in the morning I was walking past this full colonel's office and I didn't know him from Adam and he yelled out, "Captain Anderson, I want to see you," and I walked into his office. I was dressed in battle dress so it's winter and I didn't have a cap. And

32:00 he said, "You've got to go back to Vietnam. You're going on Tuesday." This was about the Thursday. I don't k now whether he could have been more subtle or what. Just all went blank. Next thing I know, still in the same uniform but with no cap, I'm in Oxford Street, Paddington, walking up past the RSL [Returned and Services League] club. I thought, "What the hell have I done, because I walked straight past the guard. I don't know how they let me out. There's no sign of any military

32:30 police or anything. So I thanked my lucky stars and I thought I'd better get back. So I turned around, crossed the road, came back, walked through the main gate, apologised to the sentry cause I didn't have a cap on and I went in and saw the guard commander and apologised to him. He said, "That's all right. I understand." And I'd walked right across the camp commandant's parade ground grass. You're not allowed to do that. So I apologised to him. He's a major. And he said, "That's all right. I understand." I went back to the colonel's office.

33:00 He said, "It's all right. We understand. I've put it back a week. You don't go next Tuesday, you go the following Tuesday." That was worse. They had a court of enquiry at 1 ARU about what had happened and I went back to Vietnam and did the court of enquiry. Gee, that was hard. I tell you that. When something unfortunate happens

33:30 and people are trying to apportion blame rather than just find a cure for this so that it's never going to happen again. I suppose in fairness that's what courts of enquiry are for. But that was a terrible experience. Eventually it finished and the unit was exonerated. There was nothing wrong with myself or the unit. Came home.

Do you mind just going back and filling in what had actually happened?

34:00 **Is this the night that you took the first timers out?**

Yeah. I didn't take them out myself. There was a lieutenant there. When I come home from Vietnam the first time I went to 3 NSWR [New South Wales Regiment] and they had depots out Wagga, Leeton, Hay, Temora, Goulburn, Bombala, and Moss Vale I think. Anyway

34:30 one of the officers there I'd sent on a mortar course and I knew he was mortar trained. That officer was there as one of the platoon commanders and that was the only reason I'd agreed to this. I'd just moved

in as operations officer that very day. This thing was to happen that night. Loyalty and duty are two things that

35:00 go together, but they're completely separate. If you're given an order by your commanding officer that something's going to happen you've got choices. You can either do as you're told exactly or excuse yourself and say perhaps there is a better way of doing this. The fellow that I took over from said, "Oh we do this all the time," and I said, "But why?

35:30 There's fellas walking around there that have been in battalions for a year that have never heard artillery fire."

What was the thing that was meant to happen that night?

I don't want to say too much about it because there's people still living that are affected by it, but it was a procedure that's done quite often.

36:00 Because it's artillery and accidents can happen with artillery as with anything, you do everything you can to make sure that a. the position where the troops are on the ground is known – and not just a six figure grid reference but an eight figure, that the position of the guns is known – same, an eight figure grid reference. The layout of the guns is

36:30 known, the gun they're going to range with is known. All of the tasks have been silently registered before. I can't from my own point of view say much more except in my view and the fact that this bloke was mortar trained reluctantly.

37:00 I didn't stop it. It wasn't my place to stop it for starters. It had been started and I didn't stop it. But my better judgement was screaming at me. Two of the rounds hit trees. Which happens. But I don't' want to say too much because there are people still alive that are affected by it.

37:30 All I will say is, for people in the future that are watching this, training has to be as real as it possibly can. There's going to be accidents in training. It doesn't matter how well we try to overcome it or the safeguards we take and the rehearsals we do and everything. There only has to be one step in the chain

38:00 that's not taken into account that can cause problems. I can't say any more because – but it was no one's fault. It happened. It just happened and it was terrible bad luck. It's something I'll live with for the rest of my life. I can still hear the blokes screaming. That's the way it is.

38:30 Sad. Just terrible. You see the Voyager getting sliced up by the Melbourne and all these sorts of things. They happen. No one knows why, but it just happens. You never forget it. You can't forget it.

I'm sorry I don't mean to press you about something you're not comfortable talking about, but I'm just confused with what actually happened? It was a training exercise where …

39:00 No. It's not – when you're in Vietnam you're in Vietnam and you're all on operations. Every time you go outside the wire you go out for a purpose. However sometimes you can incorporate things in that are going to be of advantage to the other supporting arms. Like whether you take tanks with you or armoured personnel carriers that just go alone. Fire the mortars or you don't' fire the mortars and things like that.

39:30 So it was on operations. They were out there against the Viet Cong the same as anyone else. Just unfortunate. So when I left 1 ARU I went to Sydney at the G3 air job at the Victoria Barracks and then they sent me down to 5 Squadron

40:00 with Iroquois helicopters and I did the two years with them. That was just marvellous. I told you about Frank Crowther make us throw the beer overboard. He was my boss. I don't know if I've told you about – I think it did. I told you about New Guinea and how that all worked. After that I went to Malaya again as a ground liaison officer at Butterworth.

40:30 I was the club captain of Penang Swimming Club. Sonia was the master recorder. Stephen was one of the club champs at freestyle and diving I think it was and Stuart, the younger bloke, was good at diving and club champion a couple of times at breast stroke. We had an amah called Choong Ah Lok. Chinese lady. Gorgeous. And another lady, Hamziah, a Malay

41:00 lady that used to do the washing for us. Because things weren't still right there. Under martial law sort of thing. The police had sub machine guns and all the powers under the sun. The helicopters used to fly around the married quarters once an hour or so and if the wife was in trouble she had to hang a white sheet over the balcony upstairs for the chopper pilot

41:30 to see. We had emergency rations. We had to turn them over once a month and every Friday night Choong Ah Lok used to say, "Hey, Tuan [master], Australian Chinese tonight?" Chinese food in Australia's different to Malay. She used to do the spring rolls and all this fried stuff. Just gorgeous food. And Sonia and the kids used to love it.

Tape 8

00:30 **I asked you before – you said that you'd learnt stuff in Malaya that you took to Vietnam for your first tour. Then when you went back to Malaya between your Vietnam tours, how had things changed with things that the blokes had learnt just by going to Vietnam?**

Yeah. We used Malaysia then for two things. As part as an agreement we had to be part

01:00 of the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade. They even gave us a medal, the Australian service medal, with the class Malaysia. No. Southeast Asia on it. But the training was almost the same as it was before. Some of the lessons we'd learned in Vietnam that needed emphasis, possibly we were

01:30 forced in there. But virtually it was the same. When I came back from Malaya the last time. It was two years, just went miles too fast. It was a great job. I met some wonderful people. The RAAF fellas with their marvellous sense of humour. A group of fighter pilots had

02:00 bought water beds. The secret got out in the officers' mess and they'd been away on a short course to Singapore and movements rang the officers' mess to say that these fellas had just got off the aircraft and they were walking towards the mess. The whole officers' mess to a man went out on to the veranda and these fellas were walking towards us and everyone yelled out "Surf's up." Funny men.

02:30 That was a good time. Food was good. Good company. When we came home from there we went to live in Canberra. The first house we bought was at 60 Davenport Street, Dickson. That's when I was adjutant of the CMF battalion. One of the soldiers I had as a CMF soldier was a real estate agent and you just – the way things work in life –

03:00 this guy came up and he said, "I've got an offer you can't refuse. You've got to buy this place. Get Sonia and I'll take you down and we'll go and look at it." I said, "Pal, us army officers, we just haven't got any money." He said, "You've got enough to buy this place." It was five thousand four hundred pounds. Just as I about got rid of this fellow the mailman pulls up.

03:30 He says, "Here's your tax cheque." And I open it up and it was something like fifty four pounds. It was enough to put the deposit on this place. So I had a quick word to Sonia so he drove us up and we had a look. It was a duplex place. So we bought it and it had two toilets and in those days – inside – that was unheard of. And we bought the second house at 8 Gamor Street, Waramanga, a suburb of Canberra.

04:00 I was at defence army office. The director general of accommodation and works and this Brian Avery, he's with me again. A lot of my Portsea mates, Graham Moon and Rod Palmer. We worked away in there and we looked after certain states. I had the ACT, New South Wales and South Australia. Mick Jordan from 1 RAR had Victoria and some other – I just forget what else

04:30 he had. So I worked there and that was a happy time for a few years. A different experience. Trying to get things out of Treasury and realising the world was indeed round and not flat. Looking out the window at the Brindabella Ranges longing to be back in infantry out there. Trying your hardest to get a Wednesday afternoon off for sport. Knowing how hard it is sitting there for the soft life and the old stomach and you're going to be back with the grunts again soon. They wouldn't give us a sports afternoon.

05:00 I went to 4 Battalion as OCD company up at Townsville. As I told you before after a while they lined with 2nd Battalion and they made 2/4. I had B company and then I became 2IC of the 2/4th battalion. They were good postings. Good fellas. And after that

05:30 we went to training command down in Sydney. For some reason or other I'd just about had enough of being locked up inside buildings and no prospect of getting back to a battalion again and I went up and had a talk to the general after a while and I just said "Do you think the army'd

06:00 let me go? I'd like to get out." He said, "What would you do?" "Buy a pub." He said, "Buy a pub? I'm a general and I can't even afford to buy a house." Good bloke, MacDonald. I said, "Well I don't entertain the same way you do, sir." And he said, "Well I don't entertain much either. You prove to me you can do it." I had the two savings bank things in my pocket and I pulled them out and showed him. He said, "Oh well. If that's what you want."

06:30 I got out in 1980, March. I joined the CMF 4th Battalion Royal New South Wales Regiment and they gave me B company down at Wollongong and that was good. Another lot of good fellas. Another lot of fellas that I'd known for a long while. That was a good job and I liked that. And I found the pub at Orange. I said to Sonia, "This'll do," and she just looked at me in sheer disbelief.

07:00 She said, "This is terrible." We had a beautiful home at Sylvania Waters in Sydney. She said, "No no don't like." Anyway we bought it and she broke down and cried on the corner of King and Castlereagh Street in Sydney at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Bawled her eyes out. "What have you done?" And she thumped into me. I said, "Come on. We'll be all right." It was very hard for a while. We had the ag [agricultural] college from Orange that drank at the hotel

07:30 and that was a bonus because we weren't told that they drank there at all. I think they were trying to

keep it a secret. They used to drink a lot of beer. And the girls. That and Bundy Rum and Coke. There's B & S [bachelor and spinster] balls and all that and because it was their pub I'd supply all the stuff. So we stuck that for three years and made an honest dollar out of that. Then we bought our first freehold hotel at the Oxford at Newtown. It's right near the police station and I befriended all the coppers and they had a lurk – all coppers are lurk merchants,

08:00 but these guys were brilliant. They had a scheme where the state government used to pay them by cheque. Their payday was Thursday, but the cheques were delivered to the police station on Wednesday afternoon. The deal with me was, I'd go up to the bank on Wednesday and get the money to pay them and they'd come in on Wednesday night when they'd finished their shift and I'd give them the money a day early. This was a good plan until the state government woke up to it and stopped it.

08:30 But the coppers used to give me an escort up to the bank and an escort back because it was their dough. It worked out quite well. I really made some good friends. And there's still – couple of them live down here at Tweed Heads now. They're really good blokes. We sold that about three years later and I remember we paid four hundred thousand dollars for it because that way I could keep my house

09:00 at Maroubra Beach and if I bought the other hotel behind it – I just forget the name of that – it was four hundred and twenty and I would have had to sell the house. You've heard the expression, hold your nose and jump when you go into business? Life's tough, but when you've got a wife and a kid – as I said before, and I had two old English sheepdogs – I had Sonia, Stephen, Stuart and two old English sheep dogs and I needed a paddock, I needed – so I had to keep the house at Maroubra and buy this

09:30 pub. So from the four hundred thousand and in the time we had it we built it up to something like nine thousand six hundred. So it was taking six thousand a week. Nine thousand six hundred. We sold it for six hundred and forty thousand and it was before capital gains tax came in so I was right. The next pub I bought was one point six million. The Brewers on Bourke Street. There was a mob from Fremantle and they called them the Tank Stream Brewers.

10:00 They'd set themselves and they couldn't handle it and they went bust in there. So Sonia and I took that over and in six months just sheer hard work and Sonia changed all the offices upstairs into bedrooms and we filled the bedrooms. We filled the bedrooms up and the place was really firing and all the fellas from the foreign exchange market would come up there of an afternoon after work – not every afternoon, but most. And I had the Qantas air hosties and the Ansett air hosties

10:30 and they used to drink in the side bar. And the place really used to fire. We sold that and made a hell of a profit and it was just good fun. But they had to pay the capital gains tax.

Are you using management skills that you learnt in the army?

Exactly. I was a plumber okay, but I hadn't done any plumbing for a long while. But this is the army for you. You say to yourself, okay you're a company commander, five officers and a hundred and eighteen soldiers. The five officers are

11:00 the bar staff, the hundred and eighteen soldiers hopefully are going to be your patrons. So you fall into that and you say, yeah we can make this work. And the quartermaster of 1 RAR is a fellow called Tom Buckley, another great guy, taught us lots of things without even knowing it, old Tom. He used to have expressions and things on the wall. I don't know whether it's his fault or the RQMS. "The job's not finished till the paperwork's done" and all this sort of stuff. Just taught us how to do stocktakes and everything

11:30 as young lieutenants. We hung on every word that he said. Just beaut common sense, easy. Keep it simple stupid. And if you don't need it, don't get it and all this sort of stuff. And the administration. When you're an adjutant of a CMF battalion you're everything. You're ops officer. In a CMF battalion you're everything that there is. The CO lives at Moss Vale, you're in Canberra, and the CO says to you "Look I can't possibly look after everything. You do the best you can.

12:00 The only thing I ask is that you be right." I only got my bum kicked once. But away we went. All of those things that you learn at Canungra doing the adjutant's course? Just remarkable. I've got nothing but praise for the army. To go in at fifteen and leave when you're forty two as an infantry major with all that knowledge and experience that you've got. You could take on anything. Anyway the

12:30 next pub we bought – we managed one called the Harbour View at The Rocks in Sydney. All the Irishmen used to get drunk down at the Mercantile and then they'd get into trouble there and they'd shift them on and they'd come up to this Harbour View Hotel and in those days bouncers weren't bouncers like they're bouncers today. And the drugs were around, it was only marijuana, but no heroin or anything like that was in evidence. We used to have back to back bands on Friday and Saturday night and Sunday I think.

13:00 I used to do all my own bouncing. I had one of Stephen's mates, Sean Frawley, inside. I'd stand outside. These Irishmen would come up and I'd say, "Sorry mate," and some of them you'd let in. But the bouncers that you'd hire were off duty coppers and all this sort of stuff and you didn't know what you got. It was just an unfortunate

13:30 thing. You could have led to all sorts of disasters. So I got out of that as soon as I could. I bought a hotel called the Livingstone at Petersham. It was named after Livingstone Road, the tramline where it was on.

A couple of months later they offered me the pub at Rose Bay and we bought the Rose Bay as well. That was from 1990. The both hotels settled

14:00 on the same Friday afternoon with two different lots of solicitors, two different lots of accountants, two different banks. Never do that to yourself. That's not fun. We did very well out of all that. I tried to buy the Cabarita Hotel up here near the Tweed Heads. A fellow offered a hundred thousand more than I was prepared to pay. It's very hard to buy a pub if you live in Sydney that's up here. So I said to Sonia,

14:30 "The only way to do this is to move up here." So she wouldn't sell the house at Maroubra. Cunning woman. At all. So we moved up here and we saw this place so we bought this and moved in and then six months later she decided she wanted to stay here so we sold the house in Sydney for a good price and then renovated this place. Now – I had a go at management rights for a while. That's the hardest game. You can't please anyone.

15:00 You can't please the owners, you can't please the permanents and the people that want to have a holiday and a good time. You can't please them. No one reads any instructions. No one knows anything. You've got to do everything. No one knows how to work a dishwasher or a washing machine. They don't know how to work a spa bath. They turn the spa bath on before they put the water in. It's all fruit loop stuff. So I lasted about six months in that and still made a profit and got out of that. And now I play golf at the Southport Golf Club

15:30 on Tuesday and Thursday in the morning and I'm president of Gold Coast Legacy. And I look after about two and a half thousand widows here on the coast. A lot of the 8 RAR fellows are up at Brisbane in Legacy and we talk to each other and we see each other every now and again and life's marvellous and that's me.

How often have you spoken of your experiences in Vietnam and Malaya?

Never.

16:00 The only other interview I had was with Reg Boulter in Vietnam itself. It's funny, you forget a lot of stuff but then all of a sudden one thing leads you to another. And then it leads you to something that happened before. It's amazing.

What about with Sonia?

No. I think the people that understand

16:30 are the people that were with you at the time. Even a lot of them don't understand. The people that are interested are the people that are there with you at the time. I think the good parts that you're prepared to tell people about are of no real interest to them, but they are to you and you cling to them. The proud happy times.

17:00 The things you've seen and the places you've been are always with you. You don't have to share them because they're available to everyone. There are parts that distress you and hurt you and there's even things that I haven't told you about now. You don't want to talk about them at all. Once I was told if I wrote a book that might help.

17:30 I've started about three different times. Brian Avery's written three books. Some of us are funny. Some of us can go out and play golf with other people and join Legacy. There's a fellow that lives nearby here, an infantry bloke that was in Vietnam and Borneo and he can't talk to anyone and it really upsets his wife who's gorgeous. I try to help him through her – not that I can help

18:00 people much, but I give her the advice that I'm given to pass on to him. What I'm obliged to say now is the Department of Veterans' Affairs – without them I don't know where a lot of us would be. That's not just me. A lot of the Vietnam fellas that I stay in contact with, they're very grateful.

18:30 And the interest some of the politicians take in us as well. I'm just fighting now for – the Minister for Ageing today is Bishop – a fine lady and a fine politician – and the senior Minster for Health and Ageing is Tony Abbott, another guy that I reckon's true blue and straight, a good politician.

19:00 Between them they've got the problem of ageing chapter and verse written very well and it's all practical. The solution is there. I saw Stephen Ciobo who's our local member for Moncrieff, the electorate in which I live. I've had three meetings with him on this subject. He's written to Bishop for me asking her to

19:30 to meet me at Legacy House within the next two months with a view to changing the formula that they use to work out the amount of money that they've got available to fund the state governments for aged care facilities for low and high care. I represent Legacy in this context that I can only fight for the widows that come under my care. That's the charter of Legacy,

20:00 to look after the widows and their children. But it would be remiss of me I think if I didn't mention outside of Legacy to those ministers that it's not just the widows that need this accommodation. It's the veterans themselves. Just say Sonia and I in the next ten yeas, we're both assessed as not being able to live on our own,

20:30 well that's fine. You can find if you've got the right amount of money a place in which we can both cohabit and both have an alarm button to press for a nurse or medical attention to be sought or delivered to us. Then later when we need full care, okay, they have to split us up and one stays in the low care facility, but in a different place. And the other goes to the

21:00 high care facility and that's fine. But the word that I use is affordable. There's division in life always and division in society's a terrible thing. But when you see widows that belong to Legacy divided – some were war widows in the true sense and get marvellous support from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. And others through no

21:30 fault of their own because their husbands didn't do certain things don't get that same care. The plight that they're in today – I don't know how a lot of them exist. What worries me is in the next five to ten years, but more like five years, there's going to be a problem with the number of widows that once they're assessed where we'll be able to find a place for them and it's even happening today

22:00 when they go from low care to needing high care – where do they go? So in the case of people that have got a nice home, they can sell their home and that gives them then the money to pay the hundred and twenty thousand dollars deposit and the nine hundred dollars a fortnight to live in this place. Well my argument is with the government, change the formula, let those places exist on their own that the people that

22:30 own those places develop them themselves, that the money that the government contributes to those places change the formula so that there's more in the lower echelon, the affordable accommodation for the widows that don't get the support and for the war widows that do get the DVA support. That's what I'm on about now. That's interesting and Stephen Ciobo, God love him, he's been marvellous to me and gives me a good hearing. It's great.

Can I ask you about you meeting Sonia?

23:00 Yeah. When you graduated from Portsea Bill Giles and myself went to 1 Battalion as I said and Brian Avery and Tony White. There was one of our classmates that didn't graduate. I saw him on my way down from D company, the Tarax Rangers, down to the Q store that's Tom Buckley's. There's this

23:30 fella standing there. So I handed the platoon over to the sergeant and I said, "Come on, you take the diggers down to the Q store for me. I'll be there in a minute." So I pulled this soldier over and I said, "What are you doing here, lad?" He said, "Oh he didn't make it, they said I could either get out or go to 1 battalion, So I decided I'd go to 1 battalion." I said, "Do you realise that because you finished more than six months at Portsea you're entitled

24:00 to A, B and C are subjects for corporal." "Oh I didn't think about that." So I went straight up and saw the adjutant. Fellow called Ted Chitter, another great guy. Ted Chitter said, "Oh show me." So I showed him in the good books, the AMR & Os [Australian Military Regulations and Orders] and MBIs [Military Board Instructions]. "Oh you're right. Okay." So the promoted this bloke. So the next thing he gets hold of me and he says, "Look." He's got two stripes up. I said, "That's good." He said, "We can't celebrate here. We've got to do something.

24:30 What if we meet in town?" So we met in town on a Saturday, Bill Giles, myself and this bloke. "What are we going to do tonight?" "We'll go to my girlfriend's place." So we go to the girlfriend's place. She's not there. She's around the corner at a girl called Dianne Austin. Dianne Austin run the CYO [Christian Youth Organisation] dances at Randwick on a Sunday night and I'd met her there when I left the apprentice school and went to construction. Gee, it's a little world. Anyway, Mrs Austin said,

25:00 "Where are you young people going after dinner tonight?" Diane said, "Sonia Rogers is in the Miss Australia Quest and she has organised a fund raiser down at the Bronte Surf Club because her brother's a member there." Okay. So we all hop in my beaut plumber's ute and drive down to Bronte Surf Club. I walked up the front steps and Bill Giles is on my left and I looked up at the back of the hall and there's Sonia and I went whack into Gilesy's ribs.

25:30 I said, "I'm going to marry that." "Oh get away." Anyway I met her mother and she introduced us. Anyway we had a big do at the officers' mess a couple of Saturday nights later or Friday nights I think it was. So I rang and asked her if she'd like to go and she said, "I don't think Dad'll let me." I said, "Well try anyway." And there I am, self-conscious as anything in these scarlets, feeling like something out of a zoo. And they had the funny patrol collars in those days on this white starched shirt and the bow

26:00 tie and I got one pip and one blooming medal. I felt like a prize quince. You're all right when you're with everybody in the mess and all dressed the same. Here I am out in the suburbs. So I go to the front door and I knock and her father answered the door and I thought it was her brother. Geez he looked young. And he didn't like the thought of this army bloke taking his daughter out cause Sonia was only nineteen then I think. Or twenty. Anyway I took her out.

26:30 It went on from there. I had it all worked out. I said to him some time later, "I'd like to marry Sonia, how about it?" He said, "She's not getting married till she's twenty-one." I said, "Will it be all right then?" He said, "Can you give her a house?" I said, "I can't buy one, but I can rent one. I get army married quarters. I've been in the army so long I get all these points." "Oh I suppose so, but not till she's twenty-one." I said, "Okay, the 31st of August."

27:00 He looked at me and her birthday's the 27th and that was the first Saturday after it. So we got married. Gee it was good. And all my mates – we had a military wedding and their all dressed up in their blues and their swords and stuff.- and they did the arch out the front and they're taking photos and all my mates were in agony. My old man bought all these lobsters and prawns and stuff up from Bateman's Bay and the mess put on a real good

27:30 gee it was well done. I still got the bill and everything for it I thought that much of it. But the cooks did such a splendid job for me and the diggers. The night before we were all opening oysters, Giles included. But Donald Ramsay then was a major and he was the PMC of the mess [President of the Mess Committee]. Gorgeous bloke. He said, "Oh Keith, have you thought about your brother officers, where they're going to eat on Saturday night?" I said, "Sir!

28:00 I've invited all of my brother officers to my wedding." He was that – he said, "Oh well we'll rearrange the mess bill," cause I was paying for the grog. Not only did he rearrange my mess bill I can remember him with all the older fellas like my father and Sonia's old man and all my friends' old blokes they're all sitting up at the bar on bar stools, bamboo bar stools, and they're all drinking his private stock of Glenfiddich.

28:30 Top night.

Did you manage a honeymoon of sorts?

No. We had one night. Sandy Pryor from D company was the orderly officer that night and he'd arranged to put Sonia and I in the guardhouse in the jail in the cells. So I had it arranged with Bill Giles and someone else to get my car around the back of the mess. Pryor had heard about it so he got some

29:00 of his soldiers and I had a Morris Minor and they lifted the car up on the veranda of the mess. I had to beg and scrape to get these blokes to put the car back down. I don't know how it did it but I got someone to open the other gate, the back gate near the officers' mess. We drove out through there. Poor as a church mouse I was. I'd booked a room at the Fountain

29:30 Room Motel at Casula. A ritzy spot to take the bride for the honeymoon, I tell you. Anyway Sonia was good. We went in there. Then I found out that half the guests, all Dad's mates, they were all in Tobruk with him and they'd come to the wedding and they were staying in the same motel and they knew what room we were in. It was good. Just a great night. Next day we went to Fletcher Street, Bondi at Bondi Beach. Rented a flat there. Sonia

30:00 cooked me the first meal that night and she didn't know that you put water in the peas. Had this bloody calamity. So the only thing we could do was go round to her mother's place for dinner. She said, "I thought I got rid of you two."

How hard was it when you went to Vietnam, leaving your wife behind?

When they're pregnant and Sonia was – we went the 28th May –

30:30 earlier I might have said I went in the advance party on the 8th of May, but it was 28th May and Stephen was born on the 31st of August. So Sonia was pretty well advanced then. And luckily for me while all this trouble was happening for me at Hammondville Sonia stuck it out as long as she could but she couldn't get out of the bath one morning and that scared her so she went and lived with her Mum and Dad. And she stayed there till the baby was born.

31:00 **What sort of correspondence did you have with her in that time you were away?**

The mail was murder. We had things like punch a postie and all this. It was just terrible. I told you about all the stuff of mine getting pinched off the Jeparit and I don't care who I upset about this and again it's not my information, it's hearsay, because I didn't see it. But the assumptions that were made and what I was told and what I was lead to believe –

31:30 in the Second World War the wharf labourers were accused of taking the war stores that were destined for New Guinea. Attractive stores like compasses and all that the blokes really needed. The Jeparit all my stuff went. So I don't know where. The mail was held up and went missing. We'd get a letter that'd make no sense and it referred to another letter that they'd written before.

32:00 And that was hard. That was the catalyst for my saying how careful you have to be when you're being interviewed. What you say and what you don't say, who it could hurt be it your own wife or your own family or someone else's. If something's not a fact you don't speculate and you've got to be careful. You don't mention anyone's name. But that wasn't a real good time for any of us.

So when you were finally told you were a dad …

32:30 By John Dwyer, yeah.

Must be mixed emotions.

The night before I'd written a letter and this was the day I had these four wounded blokes. So the night before that or in the afternoon I'd written her a letter and we'd have a terrible walk that day and I had

to jump across a creek on the edge of a rice paddy and it was really clear water and I couldn't see the bottom. And I pushed the soldier in front of me

33:00 with the radio set and he got across to the other side and the other diggers grabbed him, but when I went I couldn't get far enough out, and the two mortar rounds, and I went down. You look up and it's like looking at the ceiling and you can see the sky, but you can see the meniscus or whatever you call it on the water, that line. You think, I'm going to drown. And there was no touching the bottom of this. It was like a spring. I was going down and down.

33:30 I blacked out and the next thing I know two soldiers are hauling me out. I coughed and wheezed for a while and they patted me on the back of the head like they do with officers and away I went. We didn't get much sleep the night before that. The Viet Cong were blowing whistles. And it had rained. And I'd put the dry gear on. I was in and out of this so one minute you're dry and the next minute you're wringing wet and you just give up in the end.

34:00 Then we walked out and I'd written "That's the hardest day's labour I've done for a long time." I don't know why I used the word labour. So Sonia's been in the hospital at the same time. Anyhow I sent her the letter just for fun. But oh gee to be a father like that. And the other thing is not to see the baby and wanting to make sure that your wife's all right. And you want to tell her and say all the things that fathers say to their wives

34:30 when their first kid's born and then to make it worse, when Stuart was born – Sonia was pregnant when we went up to Terinda and 8 RAR was on an exercise up near the Thai border against the Ghurkhas of all people. We'd been across a big swamp, I'll never forget, and we didn't have air superiority in the exercise and the Ghurkhas did. We got up the top of this mountain and there was a radio message for

35:00 sunray call sign six something. I just forget what it was. And this guy in the anti tank platoon whose wife was nearly pregnant, right, it was his call sign. And he thinks it's his kid, but she was only nearly pregnant, I think, I'm not sure. Here's Sonia well and truly pregnant. So I didn't get a message to say. Anyway Max Mules, another good guy, he was the admin officer administration company and he came up the top and he said,

35:30 "How's it feel to be a Dad?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Didn't you get the message?" And this is a month before they'd told us virtually. So all that time I didn't know Stuart was there. Poor old Sonia. So she did both children on her own. She had her mother the first time. And Julie Clunies-Ross, one of the loveliest ladies, a strikingly beautiful woman too and she could cook beautiful soufflés. But she looked after Sonia thank god.

36:00 And Robyn Sibury. That's that.

You told us today as you've been telling us stories you can see it and hear it and smell it. What sort of things just in normal day to day life do just spark back memories of things for you?

Righto. "Waltzing Matilda" and "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head." Some hymns. I can't – I don't go to church on Sunday. I go on Anzac Day to the services and I go to

36:30 funerals when I really have to. I listen to Songs of Praise on the TV set in our family room on Sunday and sometimes I cry like a baby through them. Certain phrases. And I'm never too sure what the triggers are. Someone'll say a sentence to me and in that sentence there's something there that reminds me of something that reminds me of something else.

37:00 Before I know where I am I'm back in a situation. Names. Someone says someone's Christian name or a nickname that brings you back to a place. And now I'm even – I can see Normie Doig who was a corporal who's dead now – another great bloke – underneath a GMC truck in Malaya at Lassa trying to fix this gear box with not the right tools and he did it anyway.

37:30 I was saying to someone the other day that memories like that the infantry family itself, or the 2 Troop RAE family itself, are precious to you and you never forget them. When something happens to a member of the family, if it's your platoon or your company and you don't

38:00 see it happen but you hear about it happening even if it's months later it tears you apart and you grieve. If it's a member of the battalion and not in your company and you see them cop it or get hurt you grieve for them. Two distinct differences and I can't explain what it is or why.

38:30 The process never ends. The things that are in your mind are indelible. It's like watching a repeat of a movie. You can watch it many times. Like, I saw The Eye of the Needle the other day with Donald Sutherland in it about the German spy and I'd seen it years ago and it might

39:00 be one of these videos under here that I used to show at the pub. You forget the storyline, but there's certain things in it that drew your attention in the first place that you never forget. I can see it now, the false aircraft and everything that they'd put there to make out that Patton had another army to distract them from [Operation] Overlord.

What about with being with 5 Squadron with all the newies afterwards?

Most of Vietnam vets that were grunts

39:30 that you talk to, the sound of a wokka wokka chopper coming in – some blokes still dive for cover. It brings back different meanings to different people. To me they were salvation. It meant the rations and the water and the ammo and get rid of the clothes, get clean clothes, or they were going to get the casualty out. So to me they were wonderful machines. So I never had anything against

40:00 helicopters. I had quite a love affair with them in fact. We had long trips. You could fly from here to Adelaide and it takes three days to get from here to Townsville except when the weather stops you at Proserpine and you've got to stay there at a motel in Mackay for three days sitting with an air crew. Playing Yatz. Have you ever played Yatz? It's a dice game and they play it and they take it so seriously. Five days of that gets a bit thin. There's one place we used to stay,

40:30 an Italian family and the wife was the boss. And she used to call us the nicer boys. She'd say, "You going to town?" "No. We haven't got a vehicle." Cause we had a helicopter's no good. It's out at the airport. "Charlie, you take a these nicer boys into town." Poor old Charlie, he'd been chopping wood and he's brained out the back. He'd drive us into town and he'd say, "What time you want to be picked up?"

41:00 We used to be kind to him and only stay a couple of hours or so. Gee they were good days.

Tape 9

00:30 **Where'd you get the nickname Doc?**

At the apprentice's school back in 1953. Our first year there. And Colonel Ives, another great fellow, army corps, had a little dog called Angus. We had to put on a concert and they were running short of

01:00 class acts so they said to our company, "You've got to put on some stuff." So I took off Bugs Bunny. You know, "What's up Doc?" And it stuck. It went right through. Anyway when I got to Portsea I thought, I'll get rid of this and then Brian Avery got on the bus at Spencer Street as I said. He's Doc Avery cause he's a medic. And he knew me as Doc. So it went to 1 RAR with me. I think I got rid of it in the end.

01:30 **Coming home from Vietnam, did you suffer from PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]?**

The first time, no. I don't think so. I wasn't aware of any problem. But I was too sick from everything else that I had wrong with me to be concerned about it.

02:00 I was so busy. Busy with the battalion, being adjutant and trying to get myself fit again to go back. The second time with 8, particularly with what happened in 1ARU and what had happened with my family

02:30 I felt wretched and I was depressed and anxious and I couldn't explain why. And I was living at the officers' mess at Victoria Barracks and luckily for me there was two fellas there that were good mates – Ray Leroy, infantry, who was ADC [Aide de Camp] to one of the generals. And a fella called P.J.S. Harris. Another infantry bloke. An ex apprentice a year behind

03:00 me. He was a bricklayer. Peter had been with the Montagnards with the training team and he was with 6 RAR on their first trip as well as a company 2IC. And Peter and I were really good mates. Both drank too much. I think that's what saved us. When I say we drank too much, we drank too much.

03:30 I was talking to one of the fellas on the approach control radar. He suffered from anxiety and it's a very stressful job that they've got. He told me what he did about it. I went to a doctor and it's not at all clear and my life was just upside-down then.

04:00 I know I tried to kill myself. And I don't think it was an honest attempt. I tried to do it in the car. I was speeding up Moore Park Road and the intention was to slam into one of the big majestic palm trees that are in the middle of the road and on the side of it. I don't know whether they're still there or not. They were there. And I don't know

04:30 what had happened or why or I ran out of petrol or what or I blacked out and went to sleep. But I woke up parked correctly near the kerb, but very close to a tree and I was underneath the dashboard on the floor and the police hadn't seen me through the night or anything. It was just on daylight.

05:00 So I pulled myself together and drove back and I thought it's about time I did something about this. I can remember when I had the hotel at Orange things were particularly hard mentally for me. I kept on having behavioural problems.

05:30 Before that, if a phone would ring my tongue would swell up and I couldn't talk. If I had to meet someone I didn't know before and it was pretty serious and they weren't in uniform I'd avoid it and my tongue'd swell and I'd have a drink and I'd go back and try and recover the meeting. I took Sonia with me everywhere I had to go and Sonia used to do the talking for me.

06:00 I just told everyone, "Sorry, I had a speech impediment." The swelling in my tongue went away and it went to a stammering stage where I couldn't say a sentence. I went to a doctor with the Department of

Veterans' Affairs. It wasn't called that in those days. It was called something else. Repatriation Department or something. They had an office in York Street in Sydney.

06:30 I had a nasty experience which caused me to be claustrophobic in Vietnam. The appointment was – oh I had terrible back pains and I thought it was my kidneys playing up.

07:00 I made an appointment to see about that. They put me in a dressing room and they had cubicles like telephone booths but they were solid doors and they joined each other like fitting rooms you go to at Grace Bros and Myer. I opened the door and it was dark inside and there was no light. So I started to undress. The door shut and it was black.

07:30 I kicked the door open and damaged the door. And I got all embarrassed and confused and I rapidly got dressed and ran from the place. And I got outside into York Street and Matt Faulkner was there who was a platoon commander in 8 RAR with us. And Matt used to come home with these map things I was talking about. That's how I remember him. I used to call him Mad Map from the map team. He lives at Port Stephens now.

08:00 He reckons he's my brother and he gets drunk some nights and rings me. I told Matt what had happened. Anyway Dad had some good mates in the RSL and the Repatriation Department must have told the RSL what I'd done. So one of Dad's mates from the RSL rang me and said, "The Repat Department want to know what happened." So I told him. He said, "That's all right. Forget about it."

08:30 So they made another appointment. I didn't have to get undressed or anything. They put me with an Indian fellow, a Sikh, and when I was in Malaya the third time I befriended two Sikh brothers. There were three Sikh brothers. There was Swaran Singh, Dalget Singh and Karpal Singh. Dalget and Swaran

09:00 were both brain surgeons and Karpal Singh was a solicitor that defended Chambers and someone else with a heroin problem in Malaysia. This guy knew Dalget. He said, "That's not your kidneys. That's post traumatic stress. It's a common symptom of that. It's like kidney pain, but we'll give you all the tests and everything and make sure it's not anything wrong with your kidneys."

09:30 He proved right and he gave me the name of a psychiatrist at Bathurst called Hugh Jolly. I saw Hugh Jolly once a month on a Wednesday. I used to drive from the pub at Orange to Bathurst and see him. Then I moved from Bathurst to Sydney and they put me with another psychiatrist at

10:00 Leichhardt, Johnson Street, a Chinese fellow. I was a very busy man. I never liked wasting time. I knew how psychiatrists work. This guy had another notebook – not his ordinary diary or my file – and he's making notes in a diary. It looked to me

10:30 as though he was working out about getting his BMW serviced. I did the nana [lost my temper] – didn't say anything to him – I just walked out. When I bought the pub at Rose Bay I was in a real mess. Our younger son, Stuart, committed suicide. Met a girl, eighteen, and they wanted to get married. I said they were too young. And they

11:00 both used to work at the Oxford at Newtown with me. This Sunday he didn't turn up. Anyway. So when I get to the pub at Rose Bay I got a doctor – just forget his name. Real nice fella. That's when I discovered I had the prostate cancer and he said he had a similar symptom.

11:30 We discussed what we were going to do and what the likely outcomes would be and he said there were two types. He said one if you watched by having blood tests you could see how it's going by this count. I just forget what it is. PSI count or something. And he asked me how I was getting on with the anxiety and everything and he told me the blokes in the pub said that I was stressed out and everything and that I couldn't work in the bar any more. That I used to just put managers in there and work

12:00 from upstairs and hardly ever go down there. He put me in touch with a psychiatrist that he knew in the city in Sydney. I went to him and he didn't light any lights up for me and I thought, oh you know. And I was still busy. Anyway

12:30 I moved up here and I got a doctor called James Wright and James Wright should be a saint. He looks after a lot of the Vietnam fellows. He put me in touch with a solicitor here called Julian Bulmer and Julian doesn't suffer fools easily and he can pick the real from the bad and all. Anyway he was treating me for

13:00 anxiety too and eventually – he didn't like the words post traumatic stress so I decided to call it that and now Julian's decided to call it that. We both meet once a month in his office and he helps me through things. He described me as being a bloke that's got a big garage

13:30 with a tool board set out on the wall and none of the tools are there. So I know what the problem is, but I don't know how to fix it. He said that some of us get this and it's over with in three years or less and others it never leave them. I don't know. I just hope it does. Sonia and I go through some terrible things together.

14:00 I don't like anyone much. My brother-in-laws – I can just get on with them and that's it. One of my sisters really helped – the youngest one – she called me a baby killer when I come home the second time. So I don't talk to her much.

14:30 Blokes that I play golf with know a little bit about me and they tolerate my tantrums and this and that and there's other army fellas there that were in Vietnam that I've known for a long time. Portsea blokes and Duntroon blokes. We can talk to each other from time to time and that helps. The Second World War blokes don't understand us at all.

15:00 They just don't understand. I try to explain it as though it's like going to a place for reasons that you can't control and you're scared and you know that everyone else around you's scared. Everyone tries to control it in their own way but don't talk about it. You try to put on this veneer of

15:30 professionalism and she's gonna be right fellas when you've got no possible reason in the world for knowing that it's going to be right or not. You just do exactly as you're told. You think it's never going to end. You come home and the fear doesn't go away and you know that you've got to go back again. And when you're saddling up for the third time I think something inside you

16:00 just tells you this is enough of this. You find that you're terribly honest. And because of that honesty you don't want to put yourself in a position where you're going to embarrass yourself or your wife. So functions that you'd really love to go to you don't go to.

16:30 Like church, places you want to go, you don't want to embarrass anyone so you don't go. You wouldn't dare try to be a politician. You don't want to be on the council. You don't want to join the dart club. You don't want to join anything. I didn't want to join the golf club but Sonia made me. I still want to leave the golf club. The slightest excuse – pre-test have a bad shot, that's it. I'm leaving the golf club.

17:00 When the subscriptions are called in June I won't join again. I say that every year. I think one of the things that saved a lot of us is the fact that you can't drink drive and I volunteer to drive everywhere because I know I can't drink. And I know if I do drink that everyone'll going to have to get a cab home.

17:30 If I do drink I'm going to make a fool of myself. I set myself rituals and habits. I don't go anywhere on Saturday because I mow the lawn and clean the pool. The logic of that is I can clean the pool and the lawn any time or get someone else to do it. I've got enough money to. But that's another day that I don't have to make excuses to anyone else to go out somewhere.

18:00 I don't dare touch a drink until the news comes on Channel Ten at five o'clock at night. That's seven days a week. I have one stubbie of VB beer of a night. If I really get the taste

18:30 I might have two. If I don't have a VB I might have a glass of red wine with my dinner and after dinner I don't have coffee or anything because of the prostate problem I've got to get to the toilet all night. So I have a neat little bit of scotch. Half an ounce. I'm not happy with myself

19:00 for the way I treat other people. It's hatred in some cases in things I see when people make statements and they're wrong. I yell at the TV. Sonia's out the back painting, but Sonia still hears it and you'll hear her say, "Who are you talking to?"

19:30 And that's not good. But I can't stop it. But I think it's better for me to shout at the TV set. I don't throw things at it. I don't want to shoot it. Because of Julian Bulmer a lot of the road rage has gone and I don't carry any weapons in my car although I want to and I think the hazard button on the front of the car should be the army switch for rockets and mini guns.

20:00 And when I see people on the road that are giving the finger to other people or cutting people off then that's what I think, the rockets are mini guns but there's nothing I can do. So I don't say a word, I don't signal back to them, I just look straight ahead. Sometimes I'll pull over and wait till I calm down. The urge to get drunk is always with me, but because

20:30 of my insides – the reward's not there. People who have a hangover have a hangover, but people that suffer with what I've got inside me – the reflux, you feel like you're burning from there to there all the time. And when you're sick from the grog the next day it's just not an experience you want to go through. I eat too much because eating's release for the anxious part.

21:00 If people say something to me at Legacy and I don't agree with it I'll try and defer it or open it up and let the others discuss it and see what the mob want.

21:30 I'll close the meeting as quickly as I can. The meeting last Monday only lasted for about twenty minutes. But we get a lot of work done. I've been president of Legacy, I'm on my third year now and I officially take over my third year in about September I think. But one part of me begs me not to do it again. And the other part of me

22:00 says. "Look at the people you help." And the other thing is while you're helping someone else and listening to them you forget about yourself. I think the embarrassing thing's crying. And the Australian male's not supposed to be a person that cries.

22:30 I don't like to see people abuse other people. I don't like to see people rob other people or take things that are theirs for any reason that – even children. When my grandchildren come here and they touch Sonia's stuff I say, "Please if it's not yours, don't touch it." And when you've said that a hundred times to the same child it wears a bit thin. You've got to be very careful

23:00 especially with other people's children. And safety and common sense and the things that you see people disobey and why do people break the speed limit. You put speed limits up to eighty and they do ninety. Up on the highway to Brisbane it's a hundred and ten. They do a hundred and twenty and more. If you stay in the left-hand lane people bip you because you're going too slow if you stick on the speed limit. Whip out past to give you the

23:30 finger and all this sort of exercise. And it makes you wonder where the world's headed. It brings me to another thing. What's going on in Iraq. Because of what we've been through and because we're senior in years now and I know compared to the World War II blokes that are in their eighties I'm just a brat – but I'll be sixty-seven in October and I think to myself, there's the President of the United States, George W. Bush, following in his father's footsteps.

24:00 He thinks he's doing the right thing. And you sit and watch the Jim Lehrer Show on SBS of an afternoon around five o'clock. And you hear all the arguments that the American politicians put up. Shields and Brooks, two commentators from prestigious New York daily newspapers and their commentary. And you see the plan formulate to attack Iraq

24:30 and you know it's inevitable and you can hear yourself screaming "What are you going to do afterwards? How are you going to hand this mess over?" And then you hear people making comparisons about – after the Second World War America fixed up Germany – and look what Germany was just after the war. And they fixed up Japan, look how successful Japan is. But those two countries were different.

25:00 They had democracy. They knew what government was. They knew what law and order was. But Iraq hasn't got a clue. And you say to yourself, they're not going to get out of this easily. The war's not just going to be won. They're just going to be a walk over, but they haven't got enough troops there to do it. And it's all very well to say it all in hindsight now, but if I could see it, and the part that frustrates me is, why couldn't the American see it and if they did, why didn't they do something about it?

25:30 Why let Bush's government go and do what they've done. And how are they going to undo this mess. I come back now to the first lessons that I learnt. The comparison between the British Army looking after Malaya and the American army trying to fight the war in Vietnam. If the

26:00 British Government had declared the war on Iraq and gone in there on their own they wouldn't have let anyone walk around with a weapon. They would have found all the old weapons cases and had them destroyed or centralised and controlled. But anyone on the street with a weapon – and I'd even say the Malaysian government, they wouldn't tolerate that. Martial law'd be declared. Anyone caught with any weapon of any description,

26:30 don't have to give a reason. The weapon's taken away and they're either jailed or killed. People that do damage and harm to public property like the oil pipelines and order and hospitals – none of that would have gone on. They just didn't think the problem through. That's why we're at where we are today.

27:00 How come we could see all this that the youngsters can't. I just dunno. It beggars belief, it's just so simple.

With the value of hindsight now, obviously, are there things that you think could have been done differently when you got back from Vietnam that may have made the PTSD perhaps a lot less?

Yeah.

27:30 Repatriation Department was there but they didn't know and we didn't know what our problems were. And they were willing enough to treat us. But I heard stories later on if you were a Malayan fellow you were put in the one queue or a World War II fella you were put in the same queue. If you were a Vietnam vet you were put in another queue. Whether that's real or imagined, I don't know. If the RSL had treated us differently to the way they were treated by the

28:00 World War I blokes when they came home from World War II. If we had won the war instead of losing it. And I'll say now proudly Australians never lost a battle. Not one. But we lost the war. And that's a terrible feeling. You feel like climbing under a rock.

28:30 And you know it's not your fault and you know it's not Australia's fault. You just wonder what it was all about. Why'd they let it, like old Sumner Miller, "Why is it so?" The welcome home parade was too late. Smuggling us out of the country in civilian clothes like I described when we first went there with 1 RAR

29:00 and the advance party, that to me was – I thought I was going to get into trouble because – not a 1 Battalion member, but one of the other fellows and I think he was a provo – military policeman – had army boots on with civilian pants. I thought we were going to get into trouble over that, but we didn't. When you come home and

29:30 go to a party and people ask what you do – there's a show on at the moment, Frasier, and Frasier has a booth manager that runs his radio show with him called Ros. And Ros has all these different relationships. These are repeat shows by the way. The current one is a garbage collector. Ros doesn't like taking

30:00 him to places where Frasier's friends are because they ask what is it that the boyfriend does. So she tries to make up things or avoid the situation all together. But instead of that being helpful, it's hurtful to the garbage collector and it ruins their relationship. And that's how we were. Go to a party with Sonia even years later and her friends say, "Oh what does

30:30 Keith do?" or "What did Keith do? Oh!" You're sort of left with a stubbie in your hand. The ad on about St George Bank, "What do you do?" "I'm a banker." And even the dog looks at him. And that's what it was like for a lot of us. So we stuck to each other. Luckily for me the postings in Canberra – in Canberra, I don't know if you ever lived in Canberra but to live in Canberra

31:00 you make your own friends. You have your own circle of friends and you make your own entertainment. That's how it had to be. I think the Department of Veterans' Affairs have come a long way now. And through no fault of that department it's a lot of good stuff a little bit too late for a lot. But I'm grateful that they're there. They really helped me. I'm grateful

31:30 to Julian Bulmer. And Michael Wright and his father, Clifford, for what they did for me. Without dedicated people like that a lot of us… You talk around the veteran community and they all go to the same doctor and they've all got the same comments to make. The ones that have fallen by the wayside that go to the alcoholic places and all this sort of stuff they've

32:00 missed out, were misfortunate, didn't get the right doctors, or perhaps weren't as honest as they should have been. Some of the fellas they know they're alcoholics and they try to do something about it. Their wives try to help them and their wives are sick of it. They send them away to some place to get treatment and they start another course a week later

32:30 and they find themselves in accommodation opposite a hotel. So the cycle starts again.

How often would you say Vietnam War or Malaya even pop into your thoughts?

Daily. You've heard of tinnitus? Ringing in your ears. From the time I open my eyes of a morning it's there right until I go to bed.

33:00 It's not there when I do a good golf shot, but that's not often so it's there a fair amount of the time. And the tinnitus – I can still hear the bangs. One day Lou Brumfield, we'd just settled down, it was around lunchtime and we were digging in and we were in war zone D. It wasn't real thick jungle,

33:30 it was pretty thick. There was a sniper and he was on the northern side and as I said, the pioneer's job was to go over to battalion headquarters. We just had our field telephones put in, our land lines, and this sniper had fired about his twenty-fifth round I suppose. It was going right over our heads, aimed at battalion headquarters. The diggers thought this was a great joke. Anyway, the phone rings and it's Ron Jossey, the adjutant.

34:00 He said, "Oh Keith, Colonel Brumfield wants you to do something about that sniper." I said, "What sniper?" Ducci cracked up and started to laugh. And Lou Brumfield he said, "What did the bastard say?" I could hear him on the phone. And he said, "What sniper?" And all the staff officers cracked up. And when Lou finished laughing he said, "Tell the cheeky bastard to go and get him."

34:30 I thought, I'll make a real melodrama out of this so I got my little clearing section together and away we waddle. I go right past Brumfield and out through the mortar platoon. I got to the edge of the mortar platoon and this fella called Private Guest, he's got a GPMG machine gun. I had to get across this open rice paddy. I said to you before, you never cross open ground unless you own it unless you're covered by fire.

35:00 I thought to save time and I knew we'd just cleared all this stuff before so I asked battalion headquarters if I could use mortar platoon's machine gun to give us covering fire when I got across. So I said to Private Guest, "Just go up and down that dead tree a couple of times for me. Don't go left and right. And we'll stay out a fair distance from it. When we get across to the other side I'll give you the thumbs up and just stop firing, don't fire again unless

35:30 I really ask you to." "Yeah. Okay." So away we go. Up and down this tree. We run across the rice paddy and we get across unscathed. Blow me down, the sniper fires again, but it's not in the battalion headquarters, it's towards us. But the noise is coming from different directions each time. And I saw this bloke running. He had a pack on h is back. He was in a black shirt. I fired my Owen gun at him. But the range was too great.

36:00 I was a pretty good shot with the Owen gun and I'm darn sure I hit him but I wasn't hurting him. It must have been hitting the pack or hitting the tree around him. Anyway I got a bit sick of this and the bloke's got an M1 carbine and he turned around and he fired a shot at us and I thought that was rather impolite of him. Anyway, these blokes had a habit of disappearing into the ground. They had spider holes – and we didn't know what it was at that stage. I said to Private Knott, who I didn't know very well

36:30 "Private Knott, can you see that bloke?" He said, "Yes sir." I said, "Would you be kind enough to kill him for me?" "Yes sir," says Knott. And he's got the SLR barrel, a 762 right by my ear and goes, bang! Well I've put up with that ever since. Both my ears ring all day. That tinnitus. Every time my ears ring I think about Private Knott. I can hear certain words of conversation. I can hear Private Knott's

37:00 answer, I can hear the bang. But luckily it's connected to Lou Brumfield and the funny thing about the phone message. But yeah it's there all the time. Even in the pubs when you're busy and someone'll say something, it just all comes back. And I used to forget the orders. I'd put the beer glasses up in the order what the guy ordered and you pour the wines and spirits and soft drinks first and then you pour the beers last. And sometimes

37:30 you forget what the order was and you had to ask them again. When you go to a place like a bank to do the banking – well there you go – on Monday we had thirteen hundred dollars to bank for Legacy. I've got three secretaries there – three girls – and one was away. It's school holidays.

38:00 So the girl that does reception for me and everything, she said, "I've done the banking." And I said, "Well I'll take it now." So another Legatee, an eighty year old, he came with me down to the bank and we banked the money and there's one of the Legatees who was a POW [Prisoner of War] in Singapore. He's standing there. So wherever you go you see someone that you know and it all brings it back one way or another. But when you walk into the bank and you see one of your Vietnam mates – it's as though it was yesterday, it's all there.

38:30 That's why Anzac Day's so hard.

How do you commemorate Anzac Day?

In the old days in Sydney I used to go and march with Donny Mallon who's a 2 Troop fellow and a mob of us used to meet there in Sydney and march and we'd go to the Macquarie in such and such a street. I forget. Wentworth Avenue.

39:00 That's where all the engineers used to meet. And I used to go and talk to the 1 Battalion and 8 Battalion blokes. When Donny Mallon – his birthday's on Anzac Day and sometimes you know – why crawl when you can grovel – he'd take her away to Europe or something for her birthday. When he wasn't there I'd go and march with 8 Battalion or 1. The 2 Troop fellas

39:30 used to meet up at Maroochydore. I'd go and march with them. And then just lately since I've been with Legacy Bill Giles and I meet. He lives on North Stradbroke and I pick him up at the water taxi at Cleveland and we drive up and Sonia goes across to the island and stays with Bev, his wife. We go to the United Service Club and I met Lou Brumfield there last year with Brian Avery. It's great.

40:00 Walk down the hill. Just like old times. Everything's great. And I march with Legacy first and then with 8 Battalion second. When Peter Arnison was the governor of Queensland he used to stand there. You'd hear him yell out, "Well done, Legacy. Well done, Keith. Are you going around again?" And I'd say, "Yes. Sonia says hello." "Oh thanks mate." And then we'd come back with 8 and he'd yell out, "Well done 8, oh well done Keith," and all this stuff.

40:30 It's good. And we go up the United Service club after and have a beer and lunch and then Giles and I stay the night at the United Service club with the intention of getting terribly drunk but we're too old and too tired. We both look at each other and go off to our rooms and go to bed.

Tape 10

00:30 Anzac Day this year Donny Mullin's in Europe with his wife and Bill Giles and Bev are in Europe. They've got to London for some reason. So I'm going to stay here and do the dawn service with the Legatees that go to the dawn service and do the march at midday with the RSL at Surfers' Paradise.

01:00 And I've been asked to lay a wreath for Legacy. I'll have lunch there and then straight after lunch I'll come home. I normally unless I'm with Giles or Mullin I normally don't have a drink at all. But because they're both very sensible fellas and we've known each other – well Donny Mullin and I

01:30 been mates since 28th January 1953 and Gilesy since 1961 so I know they'd never let me get in a mess. Apart from Anzac Day we had an infantry officers' night at the United Service Club in Brisbane

02:00 and that's good fun. We stay the night again. And again it's because I'm with Giles. But there's a whole gaggle of us. A lot of 1 RAR and 8 RAR blokes together. That's good. But I pay the price the next day. But we don't go over the top. Just have a good time and a nice meal. They have a guest speaker.

How are the interactions now

02:30 **between Vietnam Vets and War World II blokes?**

With your parents and your uncles and things like that it's all right. With average RSL people I don't know. I haven't got a clue. With the fellas that I come into contact with three times a week or once a week or once a month at Legacy most of the pain has gone away.

03:00 The Vietnam fellas in particular have proved to them that we're not different. That we can be trusted to get on with the job and not waste money. I think the fact that they've asked me to be president three

years running speaks volumes apart from the fact that they're too old to go on themselves in their own mind. But that's folly. They're bright as buttons

03:30 a lot of them and they could do it. Ken Bannister was cavalry and he did president for four years. We lost a fella called Scott. He was in engineers. He was really troubled. You only have to say one word out of place to him and the whole pack of cards tumbles down.

04:00 He didn't seek help the same way I did. I think that man's going to have real strife later on. I really feel for him. A very nice capable fellow, but just can't handle certain comments. From the World War II blokes I mean. And the comments aren't necessary and possibly they shouldn't have been

04:30 said in his presence, but why say it at all? It makes you wonder if the stain in the carpet has been covered. I don't know.

When you first came home did you have any incidents with World War II guys?

No. The blokes that

05:00 drank at my hotels when I was out of the army, they got to know me pretty easily and they were pretty good. Before I got out of the hotels I was still in the army as you know so I didn't come into contact with them much. I was never one for going to RSLs. I can't stand the clatter over the PA system because of my ears and people calling out Bingo number and all that's not my idea of fun. Since I gave up the cigarettes I don't like going to places

05:30 where people smoke. So that limits your life. And as I said, I'm a bit of a recluse anyway so even in those days I was a workaholic. I didn't go out much. I listen to a lot of my mates and what was said to them. The bitterness about the RSL. You know, some of them were denied entry to the RSL. They couldn't join a sub branch and all this. Just could never

06:00 understand it. Gorgeous fellas too. I think there's still a lot of the World War II blokes that are carrying their own crosses and want to kick someone else's shins over it. I suppose it still goes on but I'm insulated from it.

06:30 **What are your thoughts, Keith, on how the Anzac Day tradition should continue from hereon in?**

All right, easy. I might offend people with this too. Never touch our flag. I don't care who you are or where you come from or what rights you think you've got, but all those guys that gave their lives… You know in the last hundred years we've had ten wars. A lot of blokes that died and have suffered

07:00 for it and I'm not talking about the Vietnam fellas now, I'm talking about World War I, World War II. It's their flag and none of us have got the right to change that, not without their permission in writing I'd say. And our country's a moral country,

07:30 the way we live. The way we're governed, our rule of law. I'm not over the top about being a monarchist or anything, but Peter Arnison who I was telling you used to be the governor of Queensland last year, Peter and I went down on the first house guard provided by the 1 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment to look

08:00 after the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh and they treated us like royalty. They really did. They wrote us lovely letters – not themselves, but they gave instructions for letters of thanks to be written to us. They ensured that we were invited everywhere that they went that we could be invited to. They didn't leave us out of conversations. If they could include us they did. They weren't

08:30 ashamed of us. They were proud of us and pleased to have us with them. The queen is a gorgeous person, a lovely lady. The Duke of Edinburgh is a man's man. Love cricket and sport and talks to you about any subject. He's caring. He made sure that he knew all about me and Peter. He said

09:00 "Do you get out of here very often?" This is at Government House in Canberra. I said, "No. I've got to stay here." He said, "All right. Are you married?" "No." "Are you engaged?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Where's your fiancée?" I said, "Up in Sydney." He said, "How often do you see her?" I said, "I can't. Not till this job's over." He said, "Do you ring her?" I said, "No. I can't." "Why not?" "There's no public phone that I can use here."

09:30 The next morning the secretary at Government House came to me and he said, "His Royal Highness has said that you are to be able to ring Mrs Rogers at any time that you want and he will pay for the phone call." I used to ring Sonia and he'd say, "Government House, Canberra, calling for Miss Sonia Rogers." And they'd connect me. Next night he said to me, "How'd the phone calls

10:00 go?" I said, "Oh thanks sir it was great." He said, "Do you have a beer at all?" "I can't sir." "The same old reasons as the phone I suppose?" "Yes." "Yes. I had a bit of an ask around. It's not good is it? You like a beer?" "Yeah, you bet." "Come here. See that trolley over there. That's all yours. Whatever you want, you can take it and I'll pay for it. The only thing that I've been told is that you have to

10:30 follow that white tape." It's like toilet tissue, big white tape that went across. And he said, "The reason for that is the house staff here are rather concerned that your footsteps on those wooden floors might

wake us upstairs. I think that's not right, but still we can honour that, can't we?" "Yes sir." Anyway, I never took advantage of it. But the offer was there. That's the sort of people they are. I don't

11:00 know about Prince Charles and I don't know about Princess Diana and what went on there. And I don't know about Camilla Parker Bowles, nor do I care. None of my business. But I really think if you look at all the democracies, if you look at all the places that are republic that are run by presidents you will either see envy of us and

11:30 our system but not just us but mainly Great Britain because they have a royal family. I cite the case now of the United States of America. You travel anywhere with Americans, they'd give anything to have a royal family. That's why the Kennedys were called their royal family. So Rwanda, Uganda,

12:00 anywhere you want where they got a president. You tell me what you think about the comparison between them and us. Adult human suffrage that we use isn't available everywhere. Even in America. It's not compulsory to vote. People who have the most money attract the most votes. That could happen here.

12:30 I don't think it does. We've all got the freedom of speech. I know that sometimes that mightn't seem like it is, but it's still there I think. We can gather or assemble on Anzac Day or any other day we want to. We can travel anywhere we want to in Australia without any restriction or limitation. Stay as long as we want. We can work if we want to. We don't have to work if we don't want to.

13:00 We can volunteer to join the army and except in exceptional circumstances no conscriptions. We're free to do what we want to do. The police can't bash us up. Whether they do or not, I don't know. The press can say what they like. I'm a bit concerned about too much power going to too few hands with the television and

13:30 and press, but people watch that. I don't have to really worry about it. So what are we going to replace the royal family with? So in my lifetime, just say that the queen stays as queen and doesn't hand over to Prince Charles. It's a decision that I don't have to make. But I'm not as strong on the monarchy as I am on the flag, but I think that

14:00 if it's not broken, don't fix it. If you're going to fix it, what are you going to fix it with? And be really sure, if they call for a plebiscite in the year two thousand and seven and ask Australians whether we want a republic and what form we want it to take I beg everyone out there that ever sees this to really think long and hard about that question.

14:30 When I was young Australia had a population of about five million. As I grew older it's grown to over twenty million. That's who they count by census. I've got no faith in the census at all. I think it's much more than twenty million. But how's that twenty million comprised? Are we all the Australian kids that we were before that were born of parents that migrated from

15:00 Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, wherever and came here. And the Australian Aboriginal children that were born of Aboriginal parents who've been given, thank God, the same rights that the rest of us have in Australia today and we're all Australians. Are they people who've come from Iraq and Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Malaysia, Japan,

15:30 America, that have been brought up in families where the parents have migrated from those countries and taught them about the goods and the bads of living in a republic or under a president. Are those bad circumstances being taught to them or do these people just think,

16:00 she'll be right mate? We've never tried it. We don't know how everybody else is going to vote, but I think we'll give it a go. My question is, why? The amount of money it's going to cost and the possible consequences that it could cause Australia really concern me. Maybe it shouldn't. Maybe I won't be long enough alive for it

16:30 to affect me. But I think of my granddaughters. I've got three beautiful grand daughters and I can't see why I shouldn't do everything I can to ensure that they have the same rights, privileges, right to a wonderful life that I've enjoyed. Why can't they have that? Why should I let someone who isn't pleased with the current system for reasons of their own try to change it all? I really just can't see why.

17:00 Please don't anyone think that I haven't thought about this. I have. Long and hard. I think I study politics more than anyone. I know I go to the ballot box and I know who I'm voting for, I know what electorate I'm in. I know what the candidates' backgrounds are, the best I can find out. I'm positive in

17:30 my mind that when I put the one in the square and drop it in the right box that I take so much care to do that I voted with my conscience the best way I possibly can for the way I think everyone should want to be. Having said that, I walk away also delighted in the right for – I mightn't agree with what you say and think but I'll give me life and I have

18:00 for your right to say it – and I just beg everyone not to take that away. And I think there's a lot of people out there that should really sit and think. Hell of a good place. They fought for the queen or the king and the flag.

18:30 For what? Sorry, but why do people want to change it? It's not bad. It's not indecent. It's not satanic. It

doesn’t cost a lot. To keep the governor as handsome as Mick Jeffery

19:00 is a lot less than it costs to keep George Bush. So let’s keep the system as it is.

Keith, just on Anzac Day, with it coming up soon, young people today seem to be embracing it a lot more. It seems to be growing in numbers of young people going? What are your feelings on that?

It’s good and it’s good to see. Especially in Brisbane. And you see the RSL and Legacy try to promote

19:30 Anzac Day through the radio, television and Legacy goes to schools and presents them with books each year prior to Anzac Day and they let us talk to the children at school assemblies and we wear our suit and medals. We don’t glorify war or anything. We just tell them that we’re giving them these books to try and help them understand why these fellas have given their lives and Anzac Day is to remember them

20:00 and for friendship. But when you see the people in Brisbane – especially in the last two years. It makes you feel very proud. You feel like yelling out, “Well done Brisbane.” In fact I think I did. But you’re not allowed to I suppose. But yeah it is growing in support and I think all the trouble we’re having in Iraq might be a reason. People are uncertain.

20:30 I think everyone should do everything they can, a. to promote Anzac Day, but to talk to the schools and to talk to the universities. I’m not saying make it a subject. But I think part of Australian history should include those things. World War I and World War II.

21:00 And what our country meant to the fellas that died and why we should honour that and at least respect them for it and it doesn’t hurt to give us one day to remember it. But I notice with dread now that Anzac Day is becoming another holiday. There are stores that are open now prior to the marches in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The football games

21:30 are advertised immediately after. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, but maybe, I don’t know, I think that it’s getting cluttered and the real meaning might be lost. I think the same argument applies today to why people are coming back to church or religion. I think that

22:00 when people are concerned about their future and their safety a lot of country’s turn to icons and a lot of people turn to tradition and a lot of people want to support what they know isn’t evil. No-one can tell me Anzac Day’s evil. And the people who are school principals that won’t let the RSL or Legacy come to school assemblies

22:30 because they refuse to glorify war want to have another good look at themselves and just have to ask yourselves are they fit people to be teaching our children.

Looking back on your military career, you’ve had a pretty amazing career starting out as an apprentice plumber and ending up an infantry major. What do you think? How do you sum it up?

Just sheer luck. If I hadn’t have

23:00 had a father and uncles that were the type of guys they were, if it hadn’t been for the Second World War, if it hadn’t have been for trying to get the army so fast and join the cadets. And Teddy Howit, if he hadn’t see that sign on the notice board, if Dad hadn’t signed the form for me to join the apprentice school. But it’s not so much luck and looking back

23:30 and saying what a wonderful life. But just for a country to be able to provide a future like that to a young boy with limited education and to make him into an average man that believes he fits in most parts of society and can be proud

24:00 of what he’s done. I think it’s good. I’m pleased and grateful, happy. I would not want it to be any different. Good life. Good bloke.

When you look back over all that time, what’s the thing that makes you most proud about your service?

24:30 The blokes. It humbles me. Sometimes I’m even – I’m so proud to have been with them.

25:00 Every one of them. Gorgeous. They’re just good blokes. All right? For a life that would never make anyone rich moneywise, it makes you so rich otherwise. Values. Trust. It’s almost the sanctity of it all.

25:30 The belief in certain things. Honour. Loyalty that you give and others give you. Service and caring for other people. And even back to the life skills that you asked me about before and the guys like

26:00 Tom Buckley, the quartermaster, and the adjutant’s school and those wise solicitors at the Bushman’s Rifle and all this sort of stuff. I feel sorry sometimes for people that just didn’t have not all of those things, but just some of them, you know. To sit there now and think back on

26:30 it all and not be ashamed, have no regrets and be proud. What a life. What a life. Just wish that we could all be somewhere together equal.

27:00 I know it's not possible and I don't know why, but it'd just be nice. I know we can't bring back the fellas that we lost. I went to a funeral for a mate one day and the celebrant said, "When your friends die they never leave you. They're still

27:30 with you all the time." And it's true. You think about them as though the day you last saw them. The way they were, the way they are, the things they said, what they meant to you. It's like when you lose your father and your Mum and your brothers, your son, you still see them in a crowd, can still hear their voice, the advice they gave you, the hard

28:00 times they gave you. No, I think the opportunities that I've been given – and the other thing, the advice I'd give anyone – when things come your way in life and you're offered to do something that's not wrong, that it's obviously right to do, don't put it off. Just go and do it.

28:30 Yeah I look back on it all and the only regret is because of what happened to me. I suppose I could have been easier on my children. That's one regret that I have. A lot better to Sonia, which is another regret that I have. And it's all right to say your wife understands.

29:00 But it's not all right at all. But nothing's going to bring young Stuart back. Nothing's going to bring my mates back. Again, it comes back, Anzac Day is important

29:30 to remember those fellas. I don't know if you've ever wondered what goes on in a soldier's or an airman's or a sailor's head on Anzac Day when there's silence, when they form up before the march, while they're actually marching. You can almost hear all the fellas around you marching, thinking.

30:00 It's just uncanny. And the other thing I've noticed about Anzac Day – especially with the 8 Battalion fellas, when we form up in Brisbane, the soldiers single you out and you're like a magnet. They come up to you and they're real pleased to see you. And they can't help themselves and before you know where you are they're talking about what happened and why and this and that.

30:30 And subjects you don't really want to talk about yourself. And you can see the pain in their eyes. They're looking for a release and they think that you've got some magic formula because you're still standing up, that you can give it to them, and you possibly can't. That's hard. But there's a lot of sorrow and sadness in a lot of people. But I think it's a respect. They go there to remember.

31:00 That's what it's all about. I just hope the rest of Australia sees it that way and I hope that the schools can see it that way as well. None of us glorify war. None of us want to see anyone else go to war for any reason. But I suppose if you've got to fight, you've got to fight. From my experience the best place to fight is anywhere but

31:30 in your own backyard. Because it makes a mess. But I can never see it doing anyone any good. The outcomes never seem to prove anything. Look at Vietnam today. As I said, I took Sonia back there for a holiday. Vietnam still floats along. Saigon's the same as it was in 1965 except there's a few more hotels going up on Tudo Street and down by the river. Bien Hoa's exactly

32:00 the same as it was when we left only we don't own the air base any more. The communists do. They won't let us visit there which I thought was pretty rude. Vung Tau's the same as it always was. I'd never been north of there before but there's no real signs of any damage in Hue or Da Nang or Hoyan. And Hanoi – which we weren't allowed to go to before –

32:30 hasn't been harmed at all. There's no bomb craters in the streets. There's no sign of any damage at all. The old French buildings are still gorgeous and wonderful and nice. The tree lined streets are still the same. The bridge over the Red River's still the bridge over the Red River. The road out to Hoa Long Bay is still the same as it was years ago I suppose.

33:00 So why change it. The First World War was the war to stop all wars or end all wars. The Second World War was the same old war that was going to end all wars. It's the same people fighting. On that note I think people tend to forget lessons that I think they shouldn't forget. One thing that strikes me is

33:30 that people should really look to America with kindness and high regard. Not so much the Germans, but the French. And I think the French for reasons that I can't understand – the way they seem to snub American and from my limited knowledge of the first two world wars, seems to me that

34:00 if American hadn't have come into the First World War the world would be an entirely different place. And if the Americans hadn't come into the Second World War the world would have been an entirely different place. I'm sure the people that are free in France today mightn't necessarily be. And the people that are free in a lot of the places in the world, if it hadn't for the Americans wouldn't

34:30 be. I think that most of the people I speak to are pretty glad that they turned up eventually for both world wars. So why can't we be a bit generous and remember that? I was in Hawaii once and a fella was sitting on Waikiki

35:00 Beach beside Sonia and I and we got to talking and we befriended him and later on he said he was coming to Sydney and would we mind if he saw us again. He was a fairly interesting fellow and I don't offer invitations to my home lightly. And the way he asked, it was nice enough. And with Americans, when they say things to you like that in Hawaii which is one of their states you think, "Oh it's not going to happen." Well

35:30 some months later he turned up. He rang us and made an appointment. He came and saw us and had dinner with us. And he took a photo of myself and the old English Sheepdogs out in the backyard and we got to talking. He had a theory that six people control the world. Now at that stage I just dismissed it. I thought, "Okay, what's he been eating?"

36:00 But when he started to explain it to me you think, "Oh yeah I can understand someone thinking that." But these days it makes you wonder why people do things. For what reason. For what expected outcome. To declare war on other people. And you can look at the humane side of it and the releasing and getting rid of Saddam Hussein and all this sort of stuff.

36:30 All the other conversations that you hear today about, is it the oil? Quite possible reason is, why do some people want to form as an ally and other people don't. How much did Iraq really owe the world? Why does

37:00 Russia go on the way it does at the moment? Why does Germany go on the way it does? Why does France go on the way it does? How come a Labour government in the United Kingdom supports George Bush and a Labor government here doesn't? So there's a lot of lessons that we've been given or taught that we don't seem to take much notice of. And we're doing it at our peril.

37:30 I don't know who's going to fix it. I can't. But it just concerns me. I just hope that people aren't frivolous with the sacrifice a lot of these great guys have made. If there is a heaven and they're sitting up at the rifle range in the sky or whatever it is and they're looking down on us I just wonder what torment they must feel at the moment.

38:00 They might know what the outcome's going to be and therefore they're not as concerned about it as Keith Anderson, but I just wonder why.

Keith, thanks for spending the whole day with us today. We're almost at the end of the tape. Is there a final message or thought that you'd like to give the archive or someone that might be watching this in time to come?

I'd like to express my appreciation for the Department of Veterans' Affairs for myself and my….

38:30 But particularly for the Legacy widows. And I ask everybody before they vote on anything, think it through. Library's are great places, repositories for books full of lessons and learning, but those books aren't any good unless you go to the library and read the books. There's a lot of good in the world. It doesn't matter what religion you are or where you

39:00 come from. We all come into the world with the same equipment and go out with the same or less. So we should all love each other, respect each other and their property and I think – religion or no religion – if you learn the ten commandments and live by them the world and yourself will be a far better place. I think

39:30 And I think family is important. Without family anything is good as the sum of its parts and a family is very important. I'm afraid that things like the family are starting not to matter as much as they ever did before and that's sad. I think there's a lot of hope for the world, a lot of hope for Australia. There's some beautiful people in it.

40:00 I get encouraged by going to the schools and looking at the young school children that we address on their assembly days. The promise is there. They're straight and true. They've got that glint in their eye. They're not scared to say what they think. I think if that's canalised the right way and the right people get hold of all this Australia's going to go from strength to strength and it'll be the wonderful country that it deserves to be. Thanks very much for having me

40:30 and you two have been delightful company.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS