Australians at War Film Archive

Murray Blake (Bludger) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 6th April 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1850

Tape 1

00:46 **Okay so we'll start off with the life arc. We always get you to do that by introducing yourself and your date of birth.**

Murray Blake is my name and the 11th of December, 1939 is when I joined this world.

If you just want to give us the précis of your life.

Sure. My father was a First World War veteran and he

01:00 had a soldier settlers' vineyard – it was called Herne Hill but most people would understand it as the Swan Valley. We actually grew grapes for Houghton's White Burgundy. The Houghton's vineyards was right next door. The Second World War came along and my father had to sell the vineyard because my elder brothers all went off to the war. He was called up interestingly enough to work on the railways. So we moved into a little

01:30 place called West Midlands. I went to school there. And then I left school at seventeen and went to Duntroon [Royal Military College]. I graduated into infantry and then had a number of appointments in Queensland and then I went to Malaysia. I came back as an instructor down at Portsea down in Victoria. I then joined the battalion that I served with in Vietnam, 5RAR [Royal Australian Regiment]. After that I went back to

02:00 Western Australia, where I originally came from, and had some postings over there. I then went to England to do a course for fifteen months. Then it was back to Singleton and then to Holsworthy where I commanded a battalion. From there I went to Canberra and spent some time in a staff appointment in the personnel area. I did another course and went out to Duntroon as the Deputy Commandant. From

02:30 there I went up to command 3 Brigade as a brigadier in Townsville. From there it was back to Canberra to a staff appointment. Then it was back to Duntroon on promotion as the commandant. Then it was land commander and I had four and a half years as the Land Commander Australia until I left. Since then I have been living in Brisbane.

I want to go back and ask you what your very

03:00 **earliest memories are?**

The earliest memory I have, interestingly enough, is being underwater in the Swan River. It would seem that I fell off a stump into the water and my elder brother came out and fished me out. I was dripping wet. But I can see very vividly looking at the roots of the tree in the bank and remember that. I would have been about three I am told, about then. That would have been 1943.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

03:30 I had five. They were all half brothers and sisters. My parents had previously been married and both their spouses had passed away. They married in 1936 and they had a total of five children between them. They were all teenagers and they didn't necessarily mix all that well the two sides of the family. My parents thought it would be a good idea if they had a small

04:00 child or they had another child which would provide a bit of focus. That was how I came along. I had two sisters. They have both passed away now but they were I suppose de facto mothers to me and always knew me, all my life, whenever I went to visit them they treated me as though I was their son. They would always have a favourite cake or whatever it was.

So when you were growing up did they all live in the same house?

04:30 Yes, we were all living in the same house. Although when the war was on I think, you've got to remember my eldest brother went off to the Middle East and so I don't have many recollections of him being about. My eldest sister married in 1942 and her husband was a serviceman. He was around for a period of time before he went to New Guinea. He was in the army. Another brother went off to England

in the air force in about

05:00 1941 I think. So he was always away. And the other brother was just a bit too young. He didn't serve in the army until just after the war. He joined in 1946. My memory of it is, and people have said, "Why did you want to become a soldier?" and I can't answer it in a definitive sense but clearly in those formative first few years I would have seen all those uniforms and I would have been conscious of the war. The family would have been

05:30 talking of the war. My brothers were coming and going obviously and that would have had some influence. I don't recall ever wanting to do anything else. I always wanted to join the army and it was the army as opposed to the navy or the air force.

How much older were all of those brothers?

The youngest next to me was fourteen and a half years older than me. And then I think there would have been – they ranged up to five or six

06:00 years above that. My brother, in the air force, served for about three years. He was a wireless air gunner in bombers. He got a DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] while he was there. My eldest brother, he was mostly a mechanic, he served in the Middle East and then came back here and didn't go to New Guinea. My brother-in-law was a signaller and a despatch rider in New Guinea and he had a lot of

06:30 close calls I think over there. So they were it. My father served in the infantry in the First World War. He didn't go to Gallipoli. He went over to France in 1915 and served right through the Battle of the Somme and most of those battles. He served in the 12/52nd Battalion.

And the vineyard that your dad had – is that a soldiers'…?

He got it after the First World War as a soldier settlers'

07:00 vineyard. He set that up I think in the early 1920s and of course you had to wait about seven years for the vines to come to fruition before it became a paying proposition. In that time he worked in the railways and became an engine driver just to earn money for the family while that was going on. When the Second World War came along of course my older brothers went off to the war and he was called up

07:30 under, I'm not sure what it was called, essential manpower anyway was what caused him to be called up. He was in the unhappy position where the sons who were old enough to work the property were at war and he was having to work and there was no one else let. I was too young and my older brother, the one next to me, was still at school. So he unfortunately had to sell it.

The soldier settlers' scheme, can you explain what you know of that?

08:00 It was land grants for returned veterans where they were given land and I think they were given some – they probably had to pay a little amount but it was probably at a very low rate of interest to see them through. I think they might have been given some sort of start-up capital. That's my understanding of it.

What was it like growing up in a

08:30 **vineyard?**

I don't have many memories of it because we left when I was very young. My knowledge of it is the family photographs I've seen of it. I had a lot of friends in the area of course because we stayed in the same area and I went to school there. So I came back later and visited the vineyard. I used to as a small boy apparently have a little pedal

09:00 car and go around and visit all the neighbours and have three breakfasts so I'm told for whatever reason.

Very industrious. Do you recall moving from the vineyard?

No, I've got no recollection of it and it's a very fine line I think to see a photograph of the house and say you used to live there and have a memory of it and I don't have any strong memories of that particular place. My memories of the family

09:30 home was back in the suburbs.

So where was that family home?

That was in West Midland in Ford Street not far from where the vineyards were in an outer suburb of Perth. We looked down over the Swan River and it was a nice big comfortable home. Interestingly enough it had a tennis court and no one in our family played

10:00 tennis. Eventually my father one day, he tended to be a little bit eccentric, he hired one of those diggers and he dug it up and planted a whole bunch of citrus trees in there. To this very day, I haven't been back there for several years; they still sit there while these rusting pipes of the old tennis court are still there. I would imagine that the old fellow probably halved the value of the property in that action. But there it was. That was the way he was.

10:30 **Do you know how your mum and dad met?**

My mother's first husband owned a greengrocer's shop and she worked in the shop. And I think when my father was widowed he used to go there as a widower and buy his fruit and vegetables. I think that's how they met. They must have obviously had some attraction. And obviously both of them needed a partner as they were struggling with teenage families. In those days

11:00 it would have been very difficult, you know, in the early '30s. That's as much as I know of it.

What sort of woman was your mum?

She was very strong and very determined and a very proud woman. She didn't have a good education in that sense but she was very good with her hands. She loved to knit and sew and do all those things and she could cook. She could just about do all those

11:30 practical things at a very good standard. My father, again he didn't have a good education, I think he was a very intelligent man. His father was killed very early when he was just a young boy. His mother had to work for them to live. And I think he spent some time in a home. Then he had to go out obviously and earn some

12:00 money to help his mother. He had a great keen interest – I always remember when we got our first television set he pulled it apart to see how it worked and then just left all the pieces around the lounge room for weeks in my mother's prized lounge room. She was absolutely furious with him but he eventually put it all back together. He told me that he had the first, what do you call that, a crystal radio down in the

12:30 Swan Valley. People used to come from all around there to hear the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] News and things in the evenings. They'd come around the house just to listen to this radio that he built. He was that sort of fellow but he was a bit eccentric. There was no doubt about it. He had some peculiar ways that were a bit different from other people. He was never deterred, particularly by signs.

13:00 I always remember going out to the airport one day. We were going to watch some aeroplanes, he was taking me out. He said, "Go on, come through and climb through this fence and get out on the airfield a bit and we can see better." I was old enough to know and read because there was this big sign saying something like, "Trespassers will be prosecuted." I said to him, "What about this?" He said, "Don't worry about it, son, they're just for the timid. We'll be right."

13:30 And nobody ever did come along. That wasn't to say he wasn't a law abiding person that was just the way he was.

Were your mum and dad strict?

Yes they were. They were and they were a lot older too I think. My father would have been very close to fifty when I was born and my mother, I think, in her late thirties. They were older in that sense. In some ways I think I was raised probably as an only child because

14:00 obviously all my other brothers were married and had left home.

With your brothers and sisters being that much older than you what did you do to entertain yourself as a child?

I had a lot of friends. I was interested in sport. After school or at weekends we would always be out doing whatever it was, kicking a footy or playing cricket and those sorts of things. Interestingly I never

14:30 played tennis and this tennis court was there. But tennis seemed to be a girls' game. My sisters played tennis and a lot of girls seemed to play tennis. And for some reason I never played tennis. I regret it now very much but I never ever thought about playing tennis. Maybe, too, I was on my own and no one else played tennis and none of my friends did but that tennis court was certainly there for a long period of time unused.

Apart from sport did you have any favourite

15:00 **toys or games?**

Nothing that springs to mind. A lot of those things in those days too there was a lot of make do. I can recall photographs of myself where we used to have these bins. They were made out of heavy cardboard and I know a lot of the food that went in to feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls], the bran and the pullet would come from them. I remember seeing

15:30 photographs where we were obviously using that to play. We'd made some sort of train out of it. I think there was a lot of just sort of mucking about with whatever was available. I don't recall any favourite toy or having a teddy bear or anything at all like that. I don't have that recollection.

What were family meal times like?

Good.

16:00 There was only my mother and father and we would often converse at the evening meal. I was away at school at lunchtime obviously. I don't have any great recollection of much conversation at breakfast. They were fine. My father, when parliament was sitting, would go and listen to parliament on the

16:30 radio at night time. He was interested in politics. I don't know that he ever belonged to a political party and I have not the faintest idea what party he would have voted for in any election. He didn't discuss it. He was more interested in the issues rather than the politics of it.

Did you go and listen to the radio with him?

Sometimes I would but I found it pretty boring though I must confess.

17:00 It wasn't particularly interesting.

What sort of food was served at meal times?

The easiest way to describe that I think would be meat and three veggies [vegetables]. My father loved steak. We had a lot of roast dinners. They would be my main memories. We always had a desert as I recall.

Was most of the food

17:30 **bought or did dad grow any?**

We grew quite a lot of vegetables. We always had a vegetable garden and we had things like fig trees out the back. We certainly bought the meat from the butcher and the usual stuff from the supermarket. But we certainly had a lot of fresh vegetables too. I can remember I used to detest broad beans and we had a lot of broad beans. We used to grow

18:00 sweet potato after he dug up the tennis court. There was a lot of sweet potato growing in amongst all the fruit trees that I think kept the neighbours supplied. There was quite a lot of stuff that was grown at home. Remember he'd come from the land too. The vineyard wasn't just a vineyard there were a lot of fruit trees and he grew watermelons and rockmelons and

18:30 that sort of thing.

Do you recall starting school?

No, I don't. I went to a school not far away. And it was only a school that went up to, I think it was then called an Infant School. It went for the first three years. I don't remember starting it. The strongest memory I have of those three years is that one day another kid and I got locked in. I don't know how that came about.

19:00 I suspect we were probably hiding or something and having a bit of fun. Anyway, I can certainly recall us being locked in this classroom with these big windows and we were clamouring on the windows to get out. Eventually, I don't know it was a cleaner that came and let us out but by that stage of the game we hadn't been home and I think my parents had started to worry about where we were.

19:30 **So those years when you were at school that would have been when the war was on?**

Those early ones, yes, towards the end of it. I would have gone in 1945 so it was the last year of the war.

So as a small child what understanding did you have of the war?

Not a lot. I think probably a simplistic view that the Germans and the

20:00 Japanese were the bad guys and the rest of the world were against them and we were eventually winning. That was a rather simplistic notion about that. I was conscious of the Japanese because I think my brother-in-law had been fighting in New Guinea and it was often referred to about fighting the Japanese so I was conscious of that. And I had another brother who was flying obviously in the UK [United Kingdom] and

20:30 bombing Germany so we were certainly aware of that.

What news were the family getting?

Of him, he used to write from time to time. There would be letters coming in. I don't think he spoke much of his experiences because I think the family were surprised when he was given a DSC [Distinguished Service Cross]. I think they discovered it when it was in the paper. It was in the

21:00 local paper which photographs of him saying that. Everybody said, "Gee, what's all that about?" I don't think he talked at the time that much about his experiences.

As a small child do you think it was more scary or exciting having brothers away at the war?

Exciting, definitely exciting. I have no recollection of being scared or concerned or anything at all about that.

21:30 There was no sense of dread or fear of invasion or any notion at all about that.

Did dad ever speak to you about his experiences in World War I?

He did. He did talk about it but not a lot. He talked about the trenches mostly and he described one particular incident that I vividly recollect. He was part of an

22:00 attack that was defeated but he was caught out in no man's land. The attack went at dawn and went on through part of the day. He was stunned by some artillery fire and he had to spend the night in this big shell as he described it, if you can imagine, it was a muddy sort of hole in the ground and there were three or four other soldiers that had been

22:30 killed that were there. And there were a couple of others that were quite badly wounded. And he described getting hold of one of the dead soldiers and pulling him over to protect him because shelling was still going on. And then he and I think there was one other fit soldier helped the couple of wounded back the next night, at nightfall. That was clearly a

23:00 traumatic experience and my recall of him telling that was that it had a significant impact on him. Interestingly though when it was evident that I was going to go to the military college and become an officer he impressed upon me the importance of never ever let any other nation take command of the soldiers. They must be led by Australians and you must do everything you can as an officer to preserve a

23:30 soldier's life. He was critical. His perception was that with the leadership of the British the Australian divisions had been used disproportionately. We had taken a disproportionate number of casualties. His impression I think also was that they probably weren't necessarily competent. The interesting thing about Dad is that he created in

24:00 me a sense of republicanism. I have always been a republican. I have had strong views all my life that we should be a republic. He was very much a monarchist. He would have turned in his grave I think if he realised that those influences where counter to what his own belief was in that sense.

So how old would you have been when dad started telling you these stories?

I would have been a teenager and probably later teens when I would have

24:30 been expressing strong interest in going to Duntroon. We would have been talking about it then. I don't recall him just bringing it up as a topic. I wasn't, "When I was at the war we did this." He did sometimes talk about being in Paris or being in Cairo or something like that but more as, "I've been there and seen this," but not so

25:00 much the battlefield experiences.

At what point do you think you actually firmed up that that is what you would do?

I would say in the last two years of schooling what I had my heart set on was going to Duntroon. That's what I wanted to do. I think I had a

25:30 vague notion prior to that that I wanted to be a soldier and then that translated into something more practical of going to Duntroon to become an officer.

So you knew right away that you wanted to be an officer?

Yes, it's interesting isn't it? Apart from my brother in the air force none of the others had been officers. They were all other ranks. And I don't recall anybody from the family saying, "Well, if you're going to be in it you should be an officer," or anything at all.

26:00 It's just what I wanted to do.

Do you recall as a child World War II ending?

The victory celebrations, no. I have no recollection of that at all. My recollection was the excitement of my brother coming home from England and us all going out to meet him. Obviously he was somebody that I didn't know all that

26:30 well. He was a very gregarious happy-go-lucky fellow and it was good to see him. We always were very close after that. I can remember my brother-in-law who had come back from New Guinea. I remember him then being around. He came and they lived in our house for a little while. Housing was very hard to get after the war.

Sorry you were talking about your brother-in-law coming home?

I can remember him coming home and, as I said, they lived with us

27:00 for a while because it was very difficult for them to get housing. They had a block of land a couple of years later that they got. I think it took them about four years after that before they could start building. They just couldn't get the building materials. Everything was so scarce after the war. I don't have any recollection either of rationing so it obviously didn't have a significant impact

27:30 on us or somehow or other my mother managed to get around that. I guess on the land we were

growing things.

Your brother and brother-in-law when they got back did you speak much with them about the war?

No, no, I don't think I can recall anything. I would have been too young. I would have been five or six years of age. I think they wouldn't have wanted to talk that much about it either. They were happy to get on with their lives. They wanted to get back with their families

28:00 and get on with it. My eldest brother, I don't remember him coming back from the Middle East. His wife, they met during the war and she was serving in the army. But he didn't ever live at home so they were obviously living in various barracks when I was a young boy and I don't know what they did after the war. They had their own home I think pretty soon after that. They were able to get a

28:30 house. So I didn't have a lot to do with my eldest brother.

You mentioned that perhaps it was in your later years at school that you firmed up your idea of going to Duntroon. Where did you go to high school?

I went to high school. In those days it was called Midland High School. Then they built a new school and we moved into it. It is now called Governor Stirling. We moved from

29:00 the centre of the town of Midland Junction where the school was in the last year. We were the first to go through that. And we moved into this new school which was just up the road from where I lived so it was very convenient. The school was still being built then. There were school cadets and I joined the school cadets as soon as I could at the age of fourteen. I loved to go on the camps. We used to always go to a place called Northam and do the

29:30 cadet camps each year and I enjoyed that. The cadet instructor was a fellow called Hume. He had served in the Ghurkhas as an officer during the Second World War. So he had quite a strong military background. I have a feeling that he may have even stayed on and served after the war for a period of time and then came out to Australia and was a teacher.

30:00 He was a very strong influence in the sense that he ran a very good cadet unit. He was clearly a good leader and set a good example I think to all of us in terms of leadership and motivating us and making sure that our instruction was good and getting things done. I think he had a lot of contacts around the place too that enabled us to do things well as a cadet unit.

Within the boys in the cadets

30:30 **are there different ranks?**

Yes there are. You work your way up and I was initially a corporal and then a sergeant and then I became an under officer which is sort of like an officer of cadets. I can remember being very proud of having that uniform and especially being very proud – I used to polish my boots. And it was a great thrill to go out on range practice and fire with a .303 [rifle].

31:00 Those sort of things were good. It was exciting.

How old would you have been when you learned to shoot?

You had to be fourteen to join the cadets so I imagine not long after that I would have gone out on a range practice. It wasn't something we did every weekend. We probably did it I think about twice a year or something like that plus when we went on the

31:30 camp.

How often would you go to cadets?

I think it was every Tuesday. We used to wear our uniform to school so that was always a bit of excitement. After school we would spend a period of time. I think if memory serves me right we might have even finished a bit early so we would have about two hours in the school. We would do things like weapon handling

32:00 and basic navigation and those sort of things.

Did you do well at school?

I wasn't a very good student as such. I was lazy and I don't think I was all that interested in a lot of the topics. I was certainly a bit of a disruptive influence in the class. There was a very strict spinster. Her name was Miss

32:30 Roberts. She lined me up one day when I was in the second last year at school. And essentially she said to me, "Look, you've got a lot more ability and you can do something but you need to sharpen up." She criticised the fact that I hadn't been cleaning my shoes and yet I was able to turn out well as a cadet so why couldn't I do it at school with my ordinary uniform?

33:00 She thought I should have paid a bit more attention in my studies and she then made me sit right at the

front of the classroom as did all the other teachers. That brought a shift of effort. I certainly took heed of her advice. I don't think I had a lot of options mind you but I did. I wasn't a keen student.

Why do you think that was that you had so much

33:30 **pride in your cadet uniform but not in your school uniform?**

I don't know. I think it was a lack of maturity. It was a peer group thing and the others probably didn't. We used to play a lot of games in the schoolyard too and I recall particularly a game where we'd either kick a football or throw a tennis ball. So there'd be big packs at either end going up and trying to get

34:00 right on people's backs. I don't know if you've ever seen those high mark things in Australian Rules [football]. It was a bitumen playground so sometimes you'd not get up there or get knocked down and it wouldn't be unusual to perhaps tear your trousers and your shoes would certainly be considerably scuffed. So it was a bunch of boys. The boys had their playground and the girls had theirs. That was a

34:30 rough and tumble affair and I guess there probably wasn't a lot of motivation if you were rolling around doing those sort of things every day.

So you played Aussie Rules at school?

Yes, I did.

Did you play for the school team?

Yes, I played for the school team. I was an average player. I lay no claim to being a champion sportsman at all but, yes, I enjoyed it.

Did you have a nickname at school?

35:00 I did get one and it was one that stayed with me all my life. It was because I was lazy, particularly, and it came out of football because I never went to training. It was "Bludger." That was my nickname. They had each year an inter school carnival and the country teams came down. In

35:30 1955 we played a carnival and I met a fellow from Northam who had played in the Northam Team. And we played on each other so we got to know each other a little bit. The next year we met each other at the selection board to go to Duntroon interestingly enough. Not long after that I think was the football carnival again and we played. His folks were in the country so he actually came and stayed at my house for a

36:00 day or two before we left to go to Duntroon early in 1957. So he of course transported my nickname across and it's been there ever since throughout.

When you say it stayed with you throughout, even through all your army career?

Yes, close mates always referred to me as "Bludge" when they rang up.

When you became an officer would that have been only other officers calling you that?

Yes. Well, soldiers would call you all sorts of

36:30 things. They all knew the nickname and I think a lot of them would refer to me behind my back as that, yes.

When you were growing up did church play a part in family life?

Yes, very much so. My parents were both keen 'church goers'. My mother was a very good singer so she used to go along and sing in the choir. My father was a very committed Freemason.

37:00 He had a great interest in religion but it was not unusual for him after the church service would finish, as we were going out, to get the local parson and, not lecture him, but perhaps give him a bit of a brief on what he thought of his sermon and give him a few pointers where he perhaps didn't agree or had a different interpretation.

37:30 **A bit of feedback?**

A bit of feedback, yes. We went to church every Sunday. That was part of the routine of the family.

What was your understanding of dad being a Freemason?

I didn't have a close understanding of it because it was all very kind of secretive. I understood that essentially it was a good and not evil thing.

38:00 He used to spend a lot of time rehearsing passages and so on like passages of the Bible as part of the ceremony and so on. It seemed to me to be a positive thing. He never encouraged me. I know my eldest brother was also a Freemason but I had left home before, when I was just

38:30 seventeen, so there was no opportunity for him to influence me to join the Lodge. I was too young at that stage of the game.

When you were going through high school and you knew you wanted to go to Duntroon did you have to have a certain high level of marks?

Yes you did. You had to qualify in the same sort of a way that you do now to get entry into a tertiary level

39:00 institution. I can't remember now but I think I just got over the bar from my memory of it.

Were any of your other friends considering Duntroon?

Not that I was going to school with, no. One or two of the people in the district were in the military and there was one of the chaps who lived out the back of our place. He went to the Army Apprentices' School and did a

39:30 trade through that. I'd see him during his leave and so on but that was about all. There was no one else that went at that time.

What were most of your mates thinking about doing after school?

A lot of them were going to be - the trendy thing to be was either school teaching which was a very strong influence and

40:00 somehow or other working in the government. I think the influence that we came through was our parents had been through the Depression and it was impressed upon us that job security was the kind of key focus of what it was that you were going to do.

Did you have a girlfriend?

In the early years, no, not particularly. Later on I did,

40:30 yes. Later on I did. I had a few like everybody does.

Tape 2

00:32 **So before you left school you had obviously clearly defined that was what you wanted to do and that was where you were aiming. Did you have to do any research or sign any papers or anything before you actually left school?**

To go to Duntroon?

Yes.

You had to fill in an application form and obviously your parents had to consent to that. Then there was an interview process which took a full day. That was interesting. And it's an

01:00 interesting thing that it hasn't changed much that selection process over the years. It was developed by the British in the Second World War and has largely gone - the actual overall activities have varied just a bit but the same fundamental things to see what your motivation was and see whether you had a bit of initiative and what your leadership skills were. We had a medical. I'm not too sure of the quality of the

01:30 medical. The doctor seemed to be a very old man to me. He probably wasn't of course. I always remember he said, "Go over there son and stand in the corner." He said, "Can you hear me?" I said, "Yes." And he obviously ticked the hearing with okay and that was it.

What did mum and dad think about your desire to join?

They were very happy. I think they were very happy. Happy because

02:00 it was going to a profession and happy in the sense that obviously they didn't have to support me to go through university. I think my mother was like all mums somewhat disappointed that I was leaving but she was used to her sons all tracking off at some stage or another.

Do you remember much about that interview process?

Yes I do.

How daunting was that for a young bloke?

02:30 Very. I was only sixteen and I was a young sixteen too. I was pretty naïve and not worldly. I hadn't travelled anywhere or been anywhere. I think by nature I wasn't a particularly outward going person and you were with essentially half a dozen other strangers. Fortunately they all seemed to be nice

03:00 people and I related well to them all quite quickly. The day was split up and in the morning there was a series of interviews. I always remember having to give a talk on a topic. With a friend of mine we used to keep bees and I spoke on bees of all things. I doubt whether that would be very interesting but

anyhow it got me by. Then in the afternoon we did these

03:30 outdoor type things. It was a bit of a test of your co-ordination and your initiative and your ability to influence a group essentially.

And what did you know of Duntroon?

I knew how long the course was. I knew obviously I was going to become an officer and I knew it was a place of tradition and status. I suppose there was a mixture in my mind of excitement and awe. Excitement at the prospect of

04:00 going somewhere that I'd never been before. It was the start of a new life but there was some awe about, "Gee this is a place of prestige and will I make it and what will it be like?"

You must have felt like it was a million miles away did you?

Yes I did, yes.

So when did you officially find out that you'd been accepted?

I would have thought probably

04:30 come time in December. Some time just before Christmas, mid to late December before Christmas. I was certainly very excited about that. We few across and it was the first time I'd ever been in a plane. My parents gave me a farewell party at the end of January and then we flew across to Melbourne. It would have been about the 7th of February or somewhere there. And then we went up by train to

05:00 Canberra and actually arrived there on the 9th of February which was a Saturday.

So between finishing school and leaving for Duntroon did you try and cram in as much life as you could?

Yes, I did, essentially I was having a good time with my friends.

Did you go into Perth much?

Not a lot. I used to go in there to the dances on a Friday night. There was a particular place called Canterbury Court that we went to

05:30 and we used to go there maybe once a fortnight. But I didn't have much money. I used to earn a little bit of money selling newspapers but other than that I was sort of dependent on my parents. And they weren't wealthy people so there wasn't a lot of money. It's quite different to today's society. There weren't food halls and places for kids to go to.

Who were your heroes at that time of life – sporting or

06:00 **film stars or anything like that?**

I was always very interested in cricket and Keith Miller [Australian cricketer] stands out as someone of great influence. My brother met him when he was over in England so there was that sort of little personal connection. He was seen as a dashing, heroic type figure. He certainly was a sporting influence. I

06:30 was very influenced by one chap I knew to go down to Albany during school holidays. We had friends down there and we'd stay with those friends and I got to know a family. Their name interestingly enough was also Lang. And he was the local headmaster. They had a son about my age so we spent some time together. I'd go to his place for a meal quite often. He used to have us sit down and

07:00 listen to the seven o'clock radio news and then we would discuss it over dinner. I was interested about that because it sparked an interest in current affairs for me. And he seemed to be a man who had a good feel and a good general knowledge and was interested in getting it across. And he had an ability to communicate with you in a way that was encouraging.

07:30 He had an influence on me from that point of view.

Had you followed what happened in the Korean War?

Not a lot, no.

Was there not much news about that?

There wasn't much news. My brother, the youngest next to me, had gone off and served in the army in the late '40s but didn't get to Korea. He was serving in an artillery unit. He wanted to go to Korea but he couldn't get there.

08:00 Then, I think out of frustration, he finished his tour and came back again. But there was nothing. The Korean War doesn't stand out at all. I think Korean veterans will say that themselves. It is the Forgotten War. It just didn't get much publicity.

So what were you instructed to take with you to Duntroon?

Look I don't recall but there were some pretty strict instructions. I recall we weren't to bring

08:30 too much and not too many personal items. I think it was the usual coat and tie but not a lot of stuff. There was a very glossy brochure type thing that came out which said, "Here's the course and here's what you bring and you're not allowed to have pocket money." There were a lot of this and that and dos and don'ts in there.

On the way there did you actually hook up with any other blokes that were on their way?

As I said I

09:00 went with Alec Lang who I played football with and we met the others on the plane going over.

Then as you got to Sydney and trained it to Melbourne did you pick up with more blokes on the way?

No, I don't recall. I think there might have been some people that came from Melbourne and were going to Duntroon but I don't think that we got to know them all that well there. When we arrived at Duntroon it was very confusing. Somebody gets a hold of

09:30 you and it's, "Go there, down to Q [Quartermaster] store and does that hat fit and does this fit?" And you have got stuff under your arms and people are yelling at you. It was a terrifying experience. Then the very next day we were then sent out in a camp out at a place called Point Hut which in those days was out in the bush. It is now a suburb. We spent about three weeks out there away from the senior classes settling in and getting to know one another.

10:00 **That sort of moment when you arrived was that quite daunting?**

Very. It is a terrifying experience. I think anybody would tell you that. There were all these people and it was different surroundings and it was, "Go here, go there, pick that up, left right, left right." It was an experience where you were sort of terrified to say or do anything. You just wanted to keep yourself as small a target as you could to get out of

10:30 there as fast as you could.

Can you explain to us is that initial time at Duntroon basic training to become a soldier first?

As it starts essentially yes. It is about how to move with the body and how to wear a uniform and turn left and turn right and to do all those things and function as a group. Now they use the terming a

11:00 bonding experience but it is developing team work and organisation skills and learning to be on time and learning to do lots of things in a logical sequence under pressure.

How quickly did you take to that?

I took to it. I was quite happy. I had that experience of school cadets which was a big help. I knew a bit about drill and I knew a bit about

11:30 weapons and that was okay. And you could help out some other guys that didn't have that experience but most had been in the cadets.

Had your dad or brothers given you any words of wisdom before you left?

No, not especially. Nothing stands out for me about that. I'm sure my father would have said to me, "Do your best and study hard son." and all those things that you'd expect from your father but there was nothing in particular.

12:00 **So after those first three weeks of bonding what was the drill then?**

We went back into the college and went back into the routine of the college and of the instruction. The way that went was you spent, in those days if was a four year course, you were divided into either engineering and science or arts in terms of academic study and you tended to do most of your training with that. So the daily

12:30 routine would be you'd get up in the morning and you'd have a roll call. They'd make sure everybody was there. You'd go to the showers and clean and tidy your room. And then breakfast parade with all the announcements. You'd dash in and get you breakfast and then out on parade and inspection and then off to classes. At lunchtime there would be another parade for lunch and then it was back into classes for the afternoon. There was sport twice a week. You were in your room for study at seven o'clock at night or

13:00 seven thirty or something until nine thirty. You'd have bed at ten o'clock and then lights out at ten fifteen. It was very regulated. There was no leave.

What were the instructors like?

Thee were good. They were all very good. They were very efficient. Most of the warrant officers were

experienced. Some had been to the Second World War and they'd all been to Korea and served in Malaya. They were all

13:30 very experienced NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and very confident and good leaders and good instructors. They had a lot of characters amongst them too. There were a lot of characters.

Did you find yourself receiving voluntarily sort of mentoring from some of these blokes?

I think naturally so. More so in your early days because there was more time spent with the NCOs who were teaching you drill and weapons handling and field tactics and those sort of things than you

14:00 did with the officers. The officers came in a bit later and they were more teaching you tactics and staff duties and those sorts of things. No they were all a lot of positive influences. There were some people that were hard that you deemed to be harsh and you deemed to be overly strict that you didn't like but I think just about everybody was respected

14:30 for their competence.

Physically what was Duntroon itself, the college, what was it like?

The environment you mean?

Was it all old buildings?

No, not at all. The college, the parade ground and three of the accommodation blocks had been built around 1911 or 1912 and

15:00 that sort of era. But it had been modernised a bit so they had high ceilings. And they were just two-story accommodation blocks with corridors down the middle. The ablutions were in the centre and you had an individual room. It was quite a comfortable room. It was a reasonably sized room like this. They had built a new block just before we had arrived called Anzac Block and that was quite modern and comfortable. It was a little bit further

15:30 away. They still had cadets in an old World War II hut which was further over and was referred to as "Over the Hill." It was a little bit further to the north. Those fellows used to have to get up a little bit earlier and go to bed a little bit later and they had a long way, it was much further to get to the parade ground and the mess hall and so on. You really drew the short straw if you had those blocks over there. I fortunately never, ever did.

16:00 The food was pretty ordinary. To this day I would never eat cabbage, diced pineapple or bread and butter custard and brussel sprouts. Those sorts of things were served up at a pretty regular and monotonous pace.

So each cadet got their own room?

Yes, you did.

I am only comparing it to what I know of basic training for soldiers – are you

16:30 **in platoons?**

Yes you are in companies and platoons and sections but all the ranks are held by cadets. So you have got four years so it works in reverse. The first year is known as fourth class and then it is third class, second class and first class. So first class run it and they hold all the ranks and they essentially are responsible for the discipline and behaviour of the cadets. When I went there we used to get paid

17:00 thirty shillings a fortnight. We got paid a bit more than that and it went into an account so that was sort of pocket money. Then I think the second year was two pounds and then it might have been three pounds and then four pounds or something like that. In our first year we were not allowed overnight leave. We could go out on Saturday nights I think

17:30 after about Easter or something like that. In the early period we were pretty much confined to camp. Canberra was a small place then. It was before the lake [Lake Burley Griffin]. There weren't a lot of places to go and you weren't allowed to have a car. So even if you wanted to go out going somewhere was awkward. We used to go out to play sport and we had social functions. One of the things that they had was what they always called the tennis party.

18:00 The requirement was one of the senior cadets had to get a girl to come to the partner you to this function. And strangely over the years an extraordinary number of cadets have married the girls they met at that tennis party. I think there were about four or five in my class that did that.

And the tennis party was the first function you could do?

The first function you could go to.

Did they have a wet canteen [a bar] or anything like that?

They did in the last year that

18:30 I was there. They started it in the year that I went but only for the senior class. They started it up that year in 1957. It was on a chit basis and I think it was open for an hour two or three times a week or something like that.

How did you find, in your first year when you were there in fourth class how did you find the first class blokes treated you?

It was pretty tough. You used to sit at a table and there would be two senior class men and two of each

19:00 class sit down there. The food would come out in a tray so for example there would be eight steaks in a tray. The junior class would serve it up and the biggest one went to the senior guy and down the line. That always went on. You would be expected to know things like the inscription on General Bridges' grave [WW1 general] or what was on the news. Sometimes you might have got a situation where a class man wanted you to eat square meals and you'd have to

19:30 sit up square and eat your meal in a square fashion using a knife and fork and that sort of training. There was never any physical problem there. There were never any threatening things. It was more about discipline and establishing a hierarchy. Some people handled that power well. Others would perhaps abuse that power from time to time and could be unduly

20:00 harsh but I don't think anybody suffered. I certainly didn't. I can't speak for the others. I never suffered personally as a result of it I always thought it was good character-building stuff.

So there was no bastardisation as you'd call it or see it?

Well sometimes people referred to that as bastardisation but as I said I didn't see it that way. I saw it as more character building. No one was being

20:30 physically threatened or physically deprived in any particular sense.

How quickly did you notice the leadership qualities in the blokes coming out and the team building and all that sort of thing?

I think you got to pick it up fairly quickly. Mind you, when you are seventeen years of age and it is your first year away from home and

21:00 you're not necessarily been exposed to many things – the first time I saw television was when I went to Duntroon. I always remember the first evening meal on the Saturday night a senior classman said, "What team do you barrack for?" And I was about to comment that I barracked for Swan Districts which was an Australian Rules team in Perth. And another fellow said, "Tell him St. George." I didn't know anything about St. George. I had never ever heard of Rugby League so I said St. George which

21:30 pleased him obviously. I still follow St. George today in Rugby League never having played the game but I've got an interest in it. You know, you were very impressionable at that age. People who looked good and spoke well were going to impress you. There were lots of those people. They were all potential leaders. It was more the ones that didn't seem to look good and

22:00 act good that stood out rather than the others. They all were a very impressive group of people.

Did you notice that there were blokes that were struggling with the training?

Yes, there were. They were struggling for various reasons. They'd come because they thought it was the right thing to do or to please their parents and it was not what they wanted to do. Some had physical injuries or sporting injuries or training accidents. That would

22:30 be a concern because it was a fairly intense course and if you were unable to participate in things you'd just fall behind. People would struggle from that point of view as well. There were those that were just clumsy and not really suited for it but they were in the minority. You think about the process of selecting, you are selecting leaders. So the majority of them had lots of leadership skills.

23:00 **You came from what I am guessing would be a working class background. Did you notice, was there was a difference amongst the cadets there between working class and upper class?**

No. I think their basis was that you went in there equal. You weren't allowed to bring in all these extras and you weren't allowed to receive pocket money from your family so it didn't matter whether you came from a wealthy family or a poor family. There was equality there. Nobody that I know every

23:30 spoke of those matters of material things. The differences were state differences interestingly enough. How various states referred to things like togs and bathers and whatever it was – ports and suitcases. There was always some sorting out of what it was that we were talking about. It always seemed to me that the West Australians and the Queenslanders were close because we seemed to have the same

24:00 attitudes towards things, natural attitudes towards things, more so than the New South Welshmen. Victorians we would get along with and South Australians more because of our interest in the same sort of football. Those differences were there.

What were the main sort of sporting things at Duntroon?

Everybody had to play sports, sports training was compulsory. In the

24:30 summertime there was cricket and there was athletics and swimming. In the winter there was football, three types of football, and hockey and that was it. There was tennis as well that went through the year. Sport was a big influence. The Duntroon sporting teams were part of the Canberra community. We played against them.

As far as sport was

25:00 **concerned all classes mixed?**

Yes pretty well within limits but, yes. The senior class were generally the ones that set the standard for that and would be part of the team. It was a good way to ease a bit of tension on the sporting field.

Along with the class system I suppose there is also a natural age difference between the guys in the first class?

Yes, very much so.

But that doesn't matter so much on the sporting field?

25:30 No. I can remember my first game of football. I was seventeen and I would have probably been about nine stone dripping wet. I was selected to play at centre half back. The fellow I was playing on was a chap called Roy Williams who had played I think for Richmond in then the VFL [Victorian Football League] and had come up and was playing for Queanbeyan. He was a man in his thirties and a big hulk of a man. It was just an

26:00 uneven contest. It was a terrifying experience to just be hurtled into that but that was the sort of thing and it was a good learning experience.

It was character building?

Yes, it was all character building stuff.

What things did you enjoy most about Duntroon?

Without a shadow of a doubt I think there were two things. Sport, I loved sport, and the friendships. Those

26:30 people they are friends for life. I don't think there is anybody in the class that I served with that I would have any issues with. Obviously I'm closer to some more than others but they are the two things that really stand out.

People would probably assume that where you are all vying to be leaders of men, egos become a clashing sort of thing?

27:00 Yes, that's a fair comment but it wasn't that evident amongst the group that we were with. My class didn't have a good rapport with the class above them for whatever reasons. We just didn't seem to get on so well and we felt they gave us a pretty hard time. They were responsible for getting us up to standard. There are

27:30 certain things you've got to do like know what uniform to wear and how to wear it. And all our underwear all had to folded in a set line and nine inches wide and X number of this and that. They were responsible for achieving that. So there was quite a heavy oversighting arrangement that goes on between classes and there is great potential for conflict there. We were determined that when we got up to the next class we would have a better rapport with the next group that came through and we had funnily enough. We were

28:00 two groups that always got on quite well together.

And apart from those friendships you have with your own class did you find that those friendships crossed the class system as well?

Yes because later on you served with people. Once you were outside Duntroon you would serve with people that were above you and below you and of course you developed friendships along the way.

People outside the military probably don't understand the nature of those sorts of friendships that you get there.

28:30 **Can you explain, do you know why those sorts of friendships are so strong?**

Why it is there? Well, you've got a shared experience for a start so it is probably day in and day out where you've been taking a guy's cigarette or giving him one and helping him out. You might be in some way helping him over an obstacle and he might help you over an obstacle. You might be lending him something. Maybe he was short of a dollar or a pound in those days.

29:00 You'd lend him a pound. You were there working as a group and doing things on a shared basis every day. The second thing is that you are working if you like – the early part of it is to come together as a sort of basis of protection against the system. You've got all these regulations and rules. You've got all

these senior classmen trying to influence you. You've got all these instructors

29:30 coming in and you can get the impression that the whole world is down focussed on you and trying to search you out. There is a natural binding together of the group to put up their defences against this. If people are getting a bit of a hard time there is a sharing process involved in all of that. That went on for four years. The other thing is there weren't many external

30:00 influences that were coming into it as opposed to civilian life where you might be going to work on the train or on the bus so you were mixing with different sort of people. Then you go into an office and you are mixing with a whole different bunch of people in the office. Then you might go into a night club and do something again different. We weren't doing that. We went to work and we went to sport and we socialised and our entire life was spent in our group.

So they become your

30:30 **family?**

Essentially, yes. As I said you are closer to some than others. You are close to them all and you find we all get on well together.

There was no real leave?

Yes, there were leave breaks. It was a bit like a school. In May and August we had leave breaks and about six weeks at Christmas time.

31:00 As West Australians we were not able to go home. The normal means of travel was by rail interestingly enough. It was about four days over and four days back so we could do that at Christmas but in May and August time we didn't go home. We either went to relatives – in my case I went to my sister's place in Melbourne, I had a brother and a sister in Melbourne and they'd moved there by then or I might stay at a mate's place somewhere else.

It must have been

31:30 **fantastic to get away and have a break?**

Yes, we'd have a great time. I always remember going to Sydney for the first time. I think it was a sporting trip somewhere. It would have had to have been after Easter. We left Canberra in this bus and it actually broke down on the way. We got into Sydney and I remember driving in this

32:00 bus along Pitt Street around two o'clock in the morning. I saw all these high rises and it was dark and I think it was wet. And I remember thinking, "Gee, this is a not very impressive and unfriendly place." It is interesting that I've lived in Sydney and so on and I've never really taken to Sydney as a great, warm friendly place. I'm sure it was that first impression that was

32:30 paraded in the wee small hours of that morning that left that indelible impression.

And you're saying that in Canberra there was nothing much there?

No, Canberra was small. I think there were only about thirty-five thousand people in Canberra then and mostly in the government. Cold, gee it was a cold place in the winter-time. I had never experienced places that were cold. And we used to put all these blankets on. We were issued with four blankets and we used to put those on and put the track suits on and a roll-neck jumper. We used to have a

33:00 rug, a bedside rug, and you'd put that over the top as well. There would be so much stuff on you in the first year that you would wake yourself up it would be so heavy. You had to push it up to turn over. By the fourth year you were like everybody else. It was two blankets and you'd wander down to the showers with just a towel and not particularly notice it.

You'd get used to it. So how did you see the changes between starting fourth year and then

33:30 **progressing? Were there any real specific changes in those years?**

I think it was just a growing confidence in the fact that – I think your first year is where certainly everything is a challenge. You're climbing up and you are getting to deal with those challenges. Once you have been there and you're second year and you're moving up and there's someone behind you then (a) you've got some responsibilities towards

34:00 them and (b) I think he challenges are not as great. You know what the system is and you know what is happening and you are there dealing with it in a way. And you know that as you learn and progress you are going to get better at it. The formality of the place I think too there weren't many things where you could step out of line

34:30 in that sense. The lecturers were all called Sir. And if you didn't hand an assignment in on time you got punished. Even though you might have been being lectured by a professor who wasn't in the military in effect he might as well have been. Most of them had been there for many, many years anyway. So it was a very regulated lifestyle. Some would

35:00 say too regulated. I might be jumping ahead here because if you said to me, "Did it prepare you well to

be an officer?" I would say, "Yes and no." Yes, in the sense that I was technically competent but, no, in the fact that I didn't really know enough about life. I always remember very early as a young officer a soldier came and he wanted to see me. The sergeant said, you know, "Private so and so wants to see you." I said, "What does he want to

35:30 see me about?" He said, "He's got a hire purchase problem." "Oh, okay. I'm a bit busy now I'll see him this afternoon." I immediately ducked next door to one of the other platoons and I said, "What's hire purchase?" I didn't have the faintest idea what that was about. It didn't prepare you for those sorts of things even like a haircut. You had to have a haircut every three weeks and you just put your name on the list down there at the barber shop. You went along and got a haircut.

36:00 I hadn't been there long and some bloke wanted some time off to get a haircut. I'm saying to myself, "Why does he want that? Why doesn't he put his name on the list and go down and get a haircut? Isn't there a barber here?" It was those simple things. They didn't teach you that much about life.

So in that regard, looking at your military career, what way did you see that blokes with any sort of life experience were better officers or was there a way of making that?

I don't

36:30 think so. I think one of the things when you are comparing eras you would need to remember that when I was a young officer, it was 1961 when I first went out three, there was still a great respect for authority. In that regard it was much easier than say for a young officer of today where his authority is not so much being challenged

37:00 but there is a much greater awareness. There is not an automatic acceptance of an order. Taking an extreme case I could say to the soldiers, "Well we'll march and crash into that wall and then we'll stop and get over it." And they'd say, "Mumble, mumble, mumble, what a dumb thing it would be to do but we'll do it because he's in charge."

37:30 Today you would say, "We're going to do this," and people would say, "Why don't we do this. We'll go around it or we'll get a ladder," and they might have a bit of a discussion about it. That's not to say in any way the standards have dropped it's just a different approach and a more healthy approach. I think, the leadership is strengthened more quickly as a result of those challenges. I didn't perceive that I was challenged enough as a young officer. There was perhaps too much

38:00 acceptance of your authority and so in my case I probably would have benefited from being challenged a bit more.

Did you notice at the time that you were going through that even perhaps the attitudes of the fellows that were going through with you were different to the attitudes of the instructors and the blokes who had possibly served in World War II and that?

I don't think there was a noticeable difference from our perspective. From theirs it was

38:30 life that was your authority. It used to be, "Gee, the army will be in a terrible state when these people get out." I think that goes on right through. I didn't find that in any noticeable way. It was quite awesome for me in a way to have a sergeant come out - my first platoon sergeant was a chap who'd served in the Second World War and in Korea and in Malaya. He had a couple of rows or ribbons.

39:00 Here was me fresh-faced and barely twenty-one years of age and not knowing anything. All the corporals had either been in Korea or Malaya and they were all experienced men. You relied very heavily on them. They understood that you were new and learning and they were there to try and influence you and teach you as best they could. They would be testing you out as well of course.

39:30 That was part of the process.

It must be hard for a lot of fellows to overcome that natural instinct to follow them given the experience that they have?

Yes. If they wanted to do something and you wanted to take a different decision. It was obviously clearly easier to go along with the group but you'd have to see that the logic of it was right and it wasn't just taking the simplest solution or the easiest way out but that it was

40:00 the correct and proper way as well. I think there was a tendency - for me as a younger officer I was perhaps very strict. I had been brought up through the military system and that was all there and I just took that straight out into it. I recall on one occasion I had called an inspection of my platoon line.

40:30 They were in wooden huts at Enoggera. They were all standing outside the room on the veranda which was unusual. And I should have twigged immediately that something was different but I didn't as I was coming up. There was this big cardboard box outside on the lawn in front of this barrack block. I said, "What's going on here? What is this? We are having an inspection? Why haven't you picked this up?" And I walked up and kicked this

41:00 cardboard box out of the way. There must have been ten snakes or something that were underneath it there. Of course I was terrified of snakes. And I was trying to put on a brave front and recover from the shock but there was a lot of sniggering going on. One of the soldiers, a Private Johnston, was the sort of

fellow who just used to spot these snakes. We'd be going on a truck and he'd go, "Stop, stop!" and he'd dive out and reach under it and come back with the snake and study it and

41:30 throw it away. It was a message to me from the platoon that I was a bit over the top and could do with giving them a little bit more latitude. I accepted that message and I understood that that was what they were saying.

Tape 3

00:30 **We've sort of moved on to being a young officer can we go back to actually passing out from Duntroon?**

The end of that period? I think that was a period of excitement and achievement. What you are interested is in what corps you are going to get into whether it be infantry, artillery or ordnance or whatever that is. You put in your preferences of course and there was a selection process for it. I wanted to go to

01:00 infantry and I was very relieved that I was able to go there. The next thing you're kind of wondering is, "Where am I going to go?" I wanted to go and serve in an infantry battalion and, "Where's that going to be?" You're looking at finishing off your training and actually going to get to do something practical after four years of instruction. The graduation parade was a very important occasion and done with considerable

01:30 tradition and dignity.

Can you tell us about that occasion?

What happens in it? Yes. It is a parade. It is always reviewed by some notable Australian, often a serviceman. In our case it was the Chief of the Defence Forces who happened to be an admiral at that time. There was a parade and then after that a ceremony to award prizes. And then there was a

02:00 ball in the evening and at the stroke of midnight you were actually wearing your officers' mess kit and you'd have your pips pinned on. In my case it was by my mother and my wife who was then my girlfriend and later became my wife. It's a period of excitement during that week because families come along. My parents came over from the west and my brother and sister came

02:30 up from Melbourne. As I said, my wife to be was there as well. I also turned twenty-one on the Sunday before. Two days before I had my twenty-first birthday which interestingly enough I shared with another member of the class. We shared the same birthday and same age so we had a combined birthday. We subsequently had a lot of memorable birthdays over the years.

So at what point in that process do you

03:00 **find out where you're going to go?**

I couldn't remember precisely but it would be about three months beforehand because you've got to make some administrative arrangements about getting there and getting your stuff sent there and so on. I knew I was going to what was then known as the 3rd Battalion, 3RAR as they called it, here in Enoggera. I was excited about that because 3RAR had a good reputation it was known as the "Old Faithful" and was considered a

03:30 good battalion and I was happy to go to Brisbane and serve there.

What was the buzz about the various battalions?

The choice essentially was either to go there or to go to another battalion in Sydney. There were only three battalions. One was overseas serving in Malaya on operational service and it wasn't policy to send a newly graduated officer there. The other alternative was to go

04:00 to the Recruit Training Establishment at Kapooka which was seen as a less than exciting alternative in those days. Earlier graduates tended also to go to the National Service Training Battalions but the National Service had stopped the year we went to Duntroon. We had the advantage of an attachment to the regular army in the

04:30 August break of our last year. In my case I was attached to the SAS [Special Air Service]. I went across there and we were actually commissioned before that time and we wore one pip on our shoulder as second lieutenants. There was that little bit of exposure to the real world to use that term before we graduated. And that was good. That was useful to

05:00 see how things were done.

And what were you actually doing on that attachment?

Understudying the other officers in simple terms. You were tracking along with them and watching what they did.

At that time when you went to do that attachment, getting out into the real army like that did it reinforce that you'd absolutely done the right thing?

Absolutely. I was exciting about getting there. I couldn't

05:30 wait to get cracking. I was looking forward to it.

So how great was the sense of achievement on passing out from Duntroon?

I think high, very high. I think you get that from a couple of areas. You get that from the pride, you sense the pride of your family in achieving that as well so there is some public esteem as well as personal esteem coming out of that. And as I said, it's a very moving ceremony where you have a

06:00 parade. And you do the review and the parade and then the senior class marches off while the rest of the corps presents arms and the band is playing Auld Lang Syne. After four years of being on this parade ground it is quite an event to march off and you hope it is the last time you'll be on it. Some of us get back on it when you go back as an instructor from time to time.

So how many people would have graduated from the senior class?

06:30 I'm vague about the figures. I think we started with about seventy odd or thereabouts. From memory I think there were forty-three Australians and six New Zealanders.

Did any of your classmates end up at 3RAR with you?

Yes, there were several, probably

07:00 six or seven that come to mind.

Was there leave before going to Enoggera?

Yes there was. We usually went home for leave. I went back to Perth to spend some time with my family before I went to Enoggera.

And what was that time like?

It was a good time. It was a happy time knowing you'd finished and you were sort of in a limbo before you started again. You had a bit more money than you normally

07:30 had and the prestige of being an officer so that was good.

What rank were you?

A lieutenant.

You mentioned at the passing out of Duntroon that your girlfriend was there who later became your wife?

Yes.

At what point did that move to that level of seriousness?

She was really by then my fiancée. We married in March of 1961.

08:00 I was the first one married in my class. She was in Perth then and we were in Brisbane so the prospect of seeing each other or spending some time together wasn't going to happen unless we married. The social custom of the day was to marry rather than to set up house together. That was rather

08:30 frowned upon particularly in the officers' mess. It was not considered the done thing at all so it wasn't an option and it wasn't discussed. I don't think my wife to be would have accepted such a proposition anyway. She wanted to get married.

Were you married in uniform?

Yes.

Can you tell me about the first day that you arrived at Enoggera?

I don't have any memory of it

09:00 funnily enough. No, I couldn't tell you that. I just don't have any great memory of that. My early memories were being taken around – in those days it was known as what was a pentropic [a form of organization of military forces] battalion so it was a big battalion. There were about ten or twelve or thirteen hundred people there. The commanding officer was a full colonel, not a lieutenant colonel as normal. They had an executive officer called the XO [Executive Officer] who was a lieutenant colonel.

09:30 He took us under his wing and I remember him taking us around and showing us how to inspect

kitchens and where the camp was. We had a period of that settling in and being told where things were and then we were allocated out. In my case I was allocated to a training company. There were more officers than there were platoons. I went of to a training company

10:00 and for the first three months what I did, with another lieutenant, we trained reinforcements coming into the battalion on a four-week course. We essentially took them out in the field and we did a final exercise down in the Numinbah Valley. And then they came back and had a parade and were presented with their lanyards and a Presidential Citation that the battalion had won in Korea. So then they were formally accepted into the battalion. So I did that for about

10:30 three or four months before I was actually given a platoon.

We spoke a little about mixing in with the NCOs and learning from them and then interacting with the men and how they challenge you or don't challenge you. What about the process of fitting in with the other officers?

Yes. It was a big battalion and there were lots of us and initially of

11:00 course for the first few months I was living in the mess and a lot did so it was easy to mix and learn from them. I was fortunate that when I went to the company there were five platoon commanders there and the other four were all quite experienced. I could go to them and I had known three of the others because they'd been at Duntroon ahead of me and only one was new to me and I could go to

11:30 them and ask for advice and they really gave it as well. It was not something that they withheld in any way. I was comfortable about that. Equally my company commander was helpful. The officers were a good source of information and happy to help out.

When you briefly mentioned earlier about the NCOs teaching you but at the same time testing you in what ways would they test you?

12:00 They might want to finish instruction early. They might want to get you to change what they were wearing so it wasn't as heavy. They might have wanted to change the route so that it was a bit easier, those sorts of examples. It was nothing major. It was a

12:30 testing exercise as you would do as just a natural thing with anybody in a senior position. You want to test them out and see what we referred to as the left and right of arc. What you are prepared to negotiate and what you're not prepared to negotiate.

And when you were talking about earlier, when you arrived the easy way to sometimes just automatically go with what they suggest. On the times you disagreed with what they suggested in the

13:00 **early days do you recall what that was like?**

It was difficult in the sense that you would obviously be worried about the fact that you weren't having a positive impact. I recall another thing. This particular sergeant, he wasn't very bright. He was a very nice man but hadn't had much of an education. He was very

13:30 practical and looked after the soldiers and they respected him from that point of view but they recognised that he wasn't necessarily a clever man. We had a roll call every morning and he would always kind of make a hash of that. More often than not, maybe two or three times a week, he'd forget to count himself. And we'd be one short and we'd have to go through the whole process again.

14:00 I got a bit short with him on this particular day and sort of criticised him in front of the platoon about doing that, not counting. "We've got to get this right. It's simple and you've been here long enough to get this right." Anyway, we got on with the day. And that afternoon I had a deputation from the three corporals wanting to come and see me to tell me that they thought it was inappropriate of me to have criticised the

14:30 sergeant in front of the platoon. He was held in much higher esteem than I was and it wasn't in my best interest to do that and they just wanted to point that out. They said it in a nice but firm way and it was a very good lesson for me to learn early. They were right and I was wrong. I shouldn't have done that. I should have pulled him to one side and spoken to him about it. I had several options

15:00 that I could have done like not getting him to call the roll would have been the simplest one. I could have found a way around that without denigrating his position.

How steep would you say the learning curve is coming out of Duntroon and actually fitting into a battalion?

I think it was steep in the sense of getting a feel of what life was about and what terms were about and how people were living and doing those things. With technical knowledge, I had enough

15:30 technical knowledge. I knew how to do all the technical things like all the minor drills and contact drills and field craft and those things. That wasn't the issue. The issue was more about administration and about the actual practice of leadership. Those were the things that you learned and you never stop

learning about leadership. You keep learning all the time about what motivates people and

16:00 how to get the best out of them.

Were there people that were your leaders and are there any specific examples where you learned good leadership skills from them?

I would say in those early days that I learned more from the leaders that I thought were not so good. I could see that they weren't having the right influence on me or other and therefore the

16:30 way they were going about it was not the way to approach it. I think I learned more from that circumstance than I did from the positive. As I said to you before you spend all your training mixing with leaders. So these people are all positive. They are all confident and they've all got leadership skills. It is more the mistakes that stood out rather than the good things because you expect the good things to happen. That is

17:00 routine. It is the mistakes that you are learning from.

It seems that you were learning leadership skills from above and below?

Very much so.

In a circumstance like you described when the corporals came to see you about criticising the sergeant how do you then once you get that information from them and you realise that there may have been a better way to handle it do you then go back and say that to

17:30 **them?**

No, I just adopted it. I just dealt with it. I didn't say anything to the sergeant either or I don't recall saying anything to the sergeant at that time. I can't remember what I did but whatever I did I know I dealt with it. I think I might have taken over calling the role myself. I think actually what I did was not be there and just

18:00 wait for them to work it out and have him come to the office and say, "There are this many men and they are ready for you."

So what would you say was the most challenging aspect of joining the battalion?

Without a shadow of a doubt I think for any young officer to stand in front of thirty pairs of eyes and say, "We're going to do this. I want you to do it and you're going to go off and do it and hopefully it will

18:30 all succeed." That's the challenge.

Is it a different kettle of fish from in Duntroon when you're moving up through the classes and you're responsible for the discipline of the younger or lower classes – is it a different thing once you join a battalion to be dishing out discipline?

Very different. Duntroon was minor offences and often awarded by peers for minor infringements and those sorts of things.

19:00 When you get into a regular unit you are not going to award minor punishments in a way. The minor punishments tended to be extra duties which meant somebody had to stay on. The majority of soldiers, I might add, were single and lived in the barracks. The NCOs were all married and lived out but it was unusual for private soldiers to be

19:30 married and to live out. There weren't many married quarters anyway. I never, ever got a married quarter when we were there. So they tended to live in the barracks and giving them an extra duty was the most common form of punishment. To charge somebody, formally charge them, it needed to be something fairly serious and they'd want to be warned first. There would be some financial penalty that could result from that so you'd be cautious about

20:00 it. Nobody was all that well paid.

Was that a challenge to sort of lean the ropes of disciplining the men?

Yes you had to work out where to draw the line and that is partly through intuition and partly by observing and working your way through that. There are times when you get difficult

20:30 soldiers and you've got to deal with them. The most effective way to deal with it that I learned was to work through the system. You would say to the sergeant, "Private so and so is disruptive, why is he disruptive?" Then as a result of that conversation, we'd say, "We should do this and this." and the sergeant might talk to the corporal. Or I might talk to the corporal whose section he belongs to and try and get some influence. I'd

21:00 deal with it that way before it got to the stage where the private was talking directly to me. You'd always try and influence it through the chain of command. You'd send the message down that what you are doing isn't what we want you to do. You'd try and find out why and say this is what we want you to do.

Is that taught to you at Duntroon or is that something that you learn?

That's part of leadership, partly how to go about it. It is certainly taught to you to use that chain of command.

21:30 **So once you got married then where did you live?**

We rented a flat in Fernberg Road initially right opposite Government House. Then we moved over to Alderley in another little flat and then we had a third place in Rosalie, we came back over that way.

Most men that we speak to

22:00 **that have become professional soldiers they say that when they join they hope at some point that they'll get overseas service, was there anything on the horizon at that early stage?**

A trip to Malaya was always sitting there. 3RAR was next in line to go to Malaya so we were hoping that that would come to fruition.

So that was a

22:30 **two year period wasn't it before you actually got to Malaya?**

The other overseas service, if you could call it that, was with the Pacific Islands Regiment which was in New Guinea and a number of people went there. I didn't want to serve particularly there. It was my view that I wanted to learn my soldiering with our own soldiers. I don't know why I had that view but I did and that is what I

23:00 preferred to do. So I didn't volunteer to serve in the Pacific Islanders Regiment. In fact I sought to avoid going there because I would have preferred to try and get to Malaya.

So in that first year and a half or two years when you were in the battalion was all the work you were doing and training, was it all geared towards going to Malaya?

No it wasn't. It was routine training in Australia. And then at the end of that two year period we had a new commanding

23:30 officer come in who was going to take us to Malaya. That battalion actually split into those that were going and those that weren't and they had a separate commanding officer. Then we started to focus, from 1963 onwards, on training for Malaya.

So when did it first become a serious possibility?

I would think about 1962 or somewhere around there.

24:00 We had a fair bit of notice. I would think said probably about a year's notice that we were going to go. Somewhere in that order.

And how was that split in the battalion decided?

The organisation changed. Without getting too complicated you might recall we had this pentropic organisation which was one that the Americans had used and we adapted

24:30 it. It didn't suit us and it went out at about that time anyway. It was a battalion group of about twelve hundred and fifty or thirteen hundred. There was a set organisation called a tropical battalion organisation that had about seven hundred and fifty which was what the battalion in Malaya worked on. So it was a matter of changing the organisation. Instead of having five platoons in a company it went to three platoons in a company. Instead of having five companies it had four and those sorts of

25:00 things. In terms of selecting the people it was a matter of those who still had time to go and weren't coming up for reposting and those who hadn't been there before. All those sort of things came into it. It was whether you wanted to go and whether you had to move somewhere else for promotion and all these factors would come in to decide.

Was there choice?

There probably was but I don't think there would have been

25:30 much. If you had reasons not to go I think they would have been listened to. And there were plenty of people who wanted to go so I think you would have been able to get your preference without any penalties.

When you were talking about if you had to move somewhere else for promotion had you been put up for promotion at this stage?

No. I wasn't due for promotion. It was going to be four years before you were due for promotion.

26:00 I didn't expect it. I commanded that same platoon from when I got it in 1961 right up to when I was promoted to temporary captain I think in about August 1964. That's unusual, an unusual background. A

number of us went through when we had three to five years, and in my case five years, in the same battalion. That's very unusual to do that.

Why is that unusual?

Normally you'd do two years and then move on

26:30 so that you'd get rotation and experience. Also it would move people along for the new graduates coming on to make space. It was just a matter of circumstance that we happened to be going to Malaya and there were people that were there. And new officers didn't get posted to Malaya, the recently graduated ones. Also in 1962 a decision was taken to raise another battalion in the PIR [Pacific Islands Regiment] so there was a needed to send more

27:00 officers to Papua New Guinea as well. A number of people were sent up there.

What was your knowledge at the time of what was actually happening in Malaya?

Good. We had a number of officers who had come back from serving there who were posted into our battalion. They were teaching us about the type of training and the environment. The thing that was very strong was the medical hygiene side with all the various

27:30 disease, water borne diseases and so on, leptospirosis and those sorts of things that were prevalent and how to deal with them and leeches and all those sorts of things. There was quite a lot on that. In terms of the technical reasons and the policy reasons. I think that was clear cut as to why we were going and where we were and where we were sitting as part of the force.

28:00 There was not an expectation that we were ever going to have immediate combat experience. The communist terrorists were by then a spent force largely living in exile in Southern Thailand but the region was unstable. We had the year before been giving quite short notice to go to Lau.

28:30 as part of a SEATO [South East Asia Treaty Organisation] deployment. There was a general expectation that we were going to be a unit that was in an environment that was unstable. I think there was quite a high expectation that we might actually see some actual active service while we were there. Of course it was exciting to go overseas. We were going with our

29:00 families as well. It was an exciting time.

Was that unusual for families to be posted with you?

No, the families went with us in Malaya. They always went across. We worked as a commonwealth brigade so there was a British and a New Zealand and an Australian battalion and equivalent small units which supported it all there. We went to a relatively new camp called

29:30 Terendak which was just outside Malacca, the old town of Malacca. It was just north of Malacca. It was a lovely camp that had been built. The accommodation was excellent and the training facilities were good. The standard of housing was very good. As a young officer we were well off too. We had servants to help in the house. We had two Chinese girls. One was a cook and one was a house girl who

30:00 did the housework. That was a wonderful thing for my wife and for a young officer.

What preparations were undertaken in the lead up for going to Malaya?

The type of training was changed. It was changed for counter terrorist operations in the jungle. We had a text book, quite a big text book, that was the bible that we used

30:30 on how to do a number of drills. If could explain it to you where you had been training in Australia and you'd go out into the bush to know that you can usually see three to five hundred yards or something like that when you're out in the bush. So that if you are going on patrol you would expect maybe to spot an enemy from a distance and for him to spot you and fire on you. But there is some distance between you and the enemy and the way in which you are going to

31:00 manoeuvre will be dictated to you by the distance and cover. In the jungle it is not there. The visibility is maybe twenty metres or maybe twenty-five metres so it is a whole different style of training. You virtually have to move in single file to get through a lot of the scrub, and I'll come back to the jungle in a minute, rather than say something like an

31:30 arrowhead formation in the open Australian country where you are covering a lot of ground. Your drills in the close country have to be very reactive because you can't see. You are relying on voices. You don't want to talk too much because the bad people can hear you and shoot at the voices. So there has got to be a confidence in the way you do your drills and your drills tended to be instant, you know, "Phoom." Coming back to the jungle, what was called the

32:00 primary jungle was very dark and dank and there wasn't much undergrowth and you actually had a bit more visibility. So it was very quiet and lots of dead fall and rotting leaves and as you walked it hardly made any noise. There were a lot of vines that dropped down that would impede your progress but generally speaking it was okay. Of course, in a lot of areas there had been cutting and you had secondary jungle and that's where it was very dense

32:30 and in some parts you actually had to cut your way through it using a machete. Those sorts of things were different. The other thing is that you were training against an enemy that was lightly armed and in a small group as opposed to a large enemy force that we were training in a scenario to defend Australia. Your tactics of attacking a lightly armed small group

33:00 obviously are more aggressive and a quicker response than they are when you are going to meet a large group.

So before you went to Malaya did you do jungle training here in Australia somewhere? Did you go to Canungra?

Canungra was the home of jungle training then. We were the first class of Duntroon to go to Canungra interestingly enough before we graduated. So we had some training there. And when we were with 3RAR we always went up and spent

33:30 a couple of weeks at Canungra each year. So we did jungle training, yes.

So you had actually done it a number of times?

We had done it and it wasn't new but we then focussed on it.

How had you found Canungra, some blokes describe it as hell on earth?

Look I wouldn't say it was hell on earth. It was tough. It had that reputation of being tough. When we first went there we were the first Duntroon cadets to go and they brought us back from

34:00 leave in January of 1960 and we went straight up there. We were all soft. Your hands were soft. They took us into the field on the first night and we were digging in and there were mosquitos and of course we had blisters on our hands and no sleep. We resented all of that and had a very bad attitude as you'd expect. The staff thought, "These people had a bad attitude so we'll sort them out."

34:30 There was a lot of harassment of us. We were called out in the middle of the night and had to jog around the roads and those sorts of things. The jungle was difficult. Lantana is terrible. There was heaps of Lantana and the only way to get through it is for someone to dive onto it, just literally run at it and dive on it, and then the next person climb onto him and dive through.

35:00 It was hot and there were leeches. I can always remember being up on the border line and just sitting there this particular time and clearing away a space and within a minute you could see all these leeches crawling towards you. There weren't a lot of pleasant experiences. I think, for me, I came away thinking, "This is a pretty tough place." I subsequently went back several

35:30 times and it was a good standard of training. It was good to have somebody watch you do something and then point out where you were going wrong. They didn't have great difficulties with it. I think every army needs an institution like that.

Do you think Canungra prepared you well for the real jungle?

Pretty well, yes I do, as well as any

36:00 institution could. You can't replicate it exactly but I think it was good.

What did your wife think when you first broached the topic of you both going to Malaya?

I think she was happy to go. She had no reason not to. She knew a number of the wives in the battalion and they were all going so the group was going. I think she was looking

36:30 forward to the lifestyle. We'd had good reports on it.

So you flew over?

Yes we did.

What was your first impression on landing in Malaya?

Well for me, I was pretty close to senior subaltern then and I had the colours. I was given the responsibility of taking the colours over. What actually happened was we got out at Singapore and I went over by

37:00 bus with the colours up to Malacca and my wife and family, the two small boys, went off separately. I caught up with them. It was different. It was certainly different, culturally different. We lived in married quarters that were just on the outside of Malacca. A number of married quarters were in the camp but we lived just outside. We

37:30 had perhaps more dealings than many others had with the local population. Our youngest son who was only a baby had snow white hair. That was considered lucky by the Chinese and I've forgotten why. I should remember but I've forgotten the reason why. When we took him out somewhere they'd always want to touch him. His forehead would always be sticky and we'd have to wash him when we got home.

38:00 Malacca was an interesting place. It was an old Portuguese settlement and colony. When I look back now, of course when you're young and you're setting out you don't have an eye for antiques and things. They had some magnificent things and when I look back I think, "Gee I would have liked that." That camphor wood chest behind you came from Malaya as well as did the lamp sitting on top of it.

How did your son cope with everyone coming up and constantly touching his forehead?

38:30 He was just a small boy. He didn't appear to resent it. He was a happy-go-lucky young kid. He certainly didn't burst into tears or anything like that.

Was there an acclimatisation period once you got there before you actually started?

Very much so. It was three weeks. You were drinking lots of water and doing a gradual exercise programme. The Australian Army had been operating in

39:00 Malaysia since 1955. We had been there for a while. We had a lot of experience and the programme was good.

Once you got there and after that three-week acclimatisation what happened then?

We went about training. We went on our first what you'd call operations in February of 1964. We went up

39:30 into the jungle. And the process was to jump off a train which just sort of slowed right down in the middle of the night so no one would know we were coming. We did that. Oddly enough my platoon had a contact on the first night. Somebody came along in the middle of the night and we fired some shots and there was some scurrying away. We didn't know who it was. We

40:00 presumed it might have been terrorists but there were a lot of smugglers there as well. We thought it was probably a smuggler. That gave some particular sensitivity to that particular area that I'd been allocated with my platoon. Not long after that I was sent out to go and do a course down in Singapore. The commanding officer decided that he would rather have a platoon in this area commanded by an officer.

40:30 My platoon was moved out in my absence and another platoon came in from the other company. Sadly that officer as he was patrolling that area at one stage was scrambling up a cliff face and tripped. As he fell forward his foot caught in these roots and the Owen gun that he was carrying on a forward grip swivelled in his hand. He didn't have the safety slide

41:00 on. There was an accidental discharge and it shot through his head and killed him. He was a good friend. His wife had just arrived because she had not come up first up. The first I heard about it was when I came home on the first weekend from Singapore on the course to be greeted by my wife crying. And his wife happened to be staying with us at the time so they were there. That was a very sad time when that happened that quickly.

41:30 The present Governor General, Mike Jeffries, was serving in the battalion at that time he was the one that had to take a party in and recover his body.

Tape 4

00:33 **So what were the general sort of operations that you were doing in Malaya?**

As I said in the early time it was the communist terrorists as they were known, the CTs [Communist Terrorist], and that was essentially just searching the jungle. It was interesting. One of the things was there were a lot of elephants up there in the northern part of it. I recall one night in particularly we used to sleep at

01:00 night time mainly on hammocks. You could get up off the ground and put a little tent sort of thing over the top of it and then sleep on the hammock. So there would be lots of cords all holding these things in place. I remember the sentry coming along and waking me up and the ground was shaking. It turned out to be these elephants. Somebody must have frightened the other one and it came lumbering through on this track that we were astride. It took all these cords and ripped them down and it was

01:30 terrifying to have this great thing come charging through in the middle of the night. They had big clumps of bamboo in the jungle and the elephants used to get down on their hands and knees and crawl through it which made it easier for us because we could walk through these clumps of bamboo that they'd opened up. There were all sorts of different snakes and birds. The rations were terrible. They were British rations although some of the meat came from

02:00 New Zealand. It was just terrible stuff. One of the things they had in them was Mars Bars [chocolate bar]. To this day I can't stand a Mars Bar. There is always a great story about the drop bear of course. It is a famous drop bear which I'm sure all veterans refer to as dropping out of the trees to get these Mars Bars. It got to the point where you'd open a tin of meat and you just couldn't look at it. So you'd

02:30 finish up just having rice and curry. I think after that first six-week operation we probably all came out of there nine stone wringing wet. We had one fresh ration drop and most of the stuff was damaged. One of the things that I think upset everybody was that they had this fresh ice cream. You can imagine fresh ice cream in the middle of the jungle, just terrific. This big container just shattered and so here was ice cream lying all over the jungle

03:00 floor and quickly melting. I think a few of the soldiers tried to scoop up a bit. It was certainly a dent in morale these fresh rations because I think most of it was destroyed.

How were those air drops done? What aircraft did they use?

They tended to use light Dakotas. They were called Hastings aircraft. The difficulty there was in the jungle we didn't have many clearings up there and so it was difficult for

03:30 them. The only other tense time that I remember at this particular part and this was actually on an exercise and we were going out on a long patrol. We were due to have an air drop in the middle of it to get some more rations. As it came up to the day of the air drop it turned out that we couldn't contact the aircraft and ultimately discovered the signaller didn't have the right little crystal for the radio set. So we couldn't

04:00 contact him and it meant that we were going to be desperately short of rations and we were about four or five days away from getting back to where we had to be. It was very dry interestingly enough and we were very short of water. So each night we'd try and calculate where we were. We were on a flat plateau up in the centre of Malaysia. As the days passed so there was increased

04:30 uncertainty as to where we were and where we were going to finish up. You could feel the tension building up within the platoon. The NCOs of a night time when we would discuss it you could see they were starting to have some doubts about me although we'd all been together for a few years. To add to the situation our platoon sergeant had walked into a hornets' nest and he had been stung terribly around the face to the point where he couldn't see

05:00 and had to be led by the hand. So he wasn't able to make any great contribution. So anyway on about day three or four after this event had happened the tension was thick in the air. We were due to come out of the rendezvous on a river about the next day I'd calculated at about midday. As it turned out we got there about one hundred metres off course.

05:30 I was a very relieved young officer I can tell you. We were all pretty hungry and scrawny after that. It was a good test for me. There was no threat of the enemy around but it was just a question of survival. We didn't have any water and we didn't have many rations and it was hard to work out where you were because even with the map we were in flat terrain and there weren't any features that you could get bearings off.

06:00 **What was your gear like at that stage?**

It was all British gear. It was good gear. There were canvas jungle boots which we all liked and kept and the British jungle webbing. We were issued with new equipment which we liked very much and we were happy to get rid of the old equipment. It was good quality gear. We also had the benefit of working with other nations. We worked with the

06:30 British battalion and a New Zealand battalion. So we saw a bit of those but the supporting units tended to be made up of the three nations and they were there. They were very interesting. The British were an eye-opener to us because it seemed like the NCOs ran the place and the officers were there just to look good. That is being unduly harsh. I will never

07:00 forget I did some training to become a field air controller and I was sent out to join this British battalion, I won't mention the name of it. I was a field air controller and I eventually arrived in the middle of a rubber plantation. It was about ten thirty in the morning. And here was the CO's [Commanding Officer] tent and outside is a sergeant in his mess kit, a white mess kit with the stripes on, standing outside the tent. I thought, "That's a bit odd."

07:30 I went in and met the CO and it was, "Oh, I say old chap, welcome. Would you like a drink? Sergeant so and so, two G & Ts [Gin and Tonic] thanks." He dives into the ice chest and comes up with this drink. I was sort of a bit aghast at that. I was attached to go and join this particular company. I was taken out in a jeep and they are going up the hill and I eventually get to join up with them.

08:00 The company commander is walking along and he's got a big stick and he's just carrying a water bottle and his pack I think is in the back of the land rover. Here were all his little soldiers all climbing up the hill with a big pack. So I arrived and introduced myself and he said, "Oh," he said, "Jolly good" he said, "You must be the chap with the map." So I was a bit taken aback by this but as it turned out he was quite right. He didn't have a map and didn't have the faintest idea of where he was

08:30 and was clearly going to rely on me to do his navigation. Up the front they knew what was going on. They were interesting times.

There kind of be that common assumption that the Australian Army had somehow been born out of the British Army and coming out of that but yet we were pretty different weren't we?

Very different. It was also interesting because the Scots' Guards were there at one stage. The thing to

09:00 do would be to get yourself invited over to have breakfast because they didn't speak at breakfast. It turned out that many centuries ago the Zulus or somebody had surprised them at breakfast when they were camped. So the tradition was that all the officers came in and they sat down for breakfast and they had their hats on and nobody was to speak. They had obviously their cutlery all laid out and there was a little pad and a pencil and you wrote out what you

09:30 wanted and a steward took it away and came back and put it down and that was it. Everybody just read the paper. It was just a very pleasant breakfast and not a word was spoken. It was fascinating to us who were in a relatively new country as you could imagine to see this go on. It was a daily event.

In any of your time did you see our own Aussie [Australian] traditions amongst the battalions and things like that?

It wasn't really

10:00 evident. There was a great pride about each battalion in that it wore a separate colour lanyard from the other ones but we all the same cap badge of the Royal Australian Regiment. Each battalion had built up a sort of history. They had all formed in Morotai just after the Second World War from the brigades that had

10:30 fought up in the campaign and particularly done the hard landings around Tarakan and Balikpapan and so on. Then they had gone to Korea and then they had been working. So there had generally been somebody from the regiment on active service ever since the Second World War. So there were lots of characters in the regiment and the battalion had done various things. 3RAR had fought the battle of Kapyong in Korea. So there was that sort of reputation

11:00 around it. There were certainly lots of characters as such particularly amongst the senior NCOs that were there.

Generally if you went out on patrol how long would those patrols be?

They could last anything from several days to a day patrol. When we were on those border operations against the communist terrorists what we tended to do was set up a patrol base. We might be there two or three weeks and patrol out daily from that base perhaps overnight in an

11:30 ambush position and then come back to that base.

And how set up was that base that you'd operate from?

As I said you'd put a stretcher up and just a tent over it but everything would be pulled down during the day.

No one would be left there when you went out?

Sometimes there would be. We'd normally leave a section behind to rest and protect our base while we went out.

It must be quite odd to be out on patrol and know that that night you are going to be at home with the missus?

12:00 No, we were out in the field.

No, on the closer operations when you might just be out -

No, never that. If we were on training exercises we would go out and we would stay out on an exercise or whatever it was. From time to time we would do a pseudo readiness exercise because we were part of the Far East Strategic Force. We weren't allowed to deploy from Malaysia.

12:30 For political reasons so we had to deploy from Singapore. Mostly if we were going on exercise we'd call a short notice deployment and test our readiness and go to Singapore and then come back into Malaysia to do that. That was interesting.

When you were operating up near the border how critical was it that you were not crossing borders and things like that?

I think in essence you wouldn't want to go too far but some patrols I think did go across because there was nothing marked.

13:00 A couple of guys mentioned that not far over the border there were some big caves and people were living in these caves. There were communities in there and whether they were part of the communist terrorists or not I don't think was ever established. I think there was a bit of cross border movement from time to time but they would know that we were in the area and

13:30 avoid us. There wasn't much sign when we were up there of much movement. There weren't big trails or anything like that that I saw where I was.

So there weren't too many contacts that you had up there?

No, none at all. Apart from that first night there were no other contacts. We found a few old cases of supplies and things. They were generally buried in old kerosene tin-type things but nothing of note.

14:00 Then things changed. When Malaysia was formed and Confrontation started then it was a different arrangement. We were no longer focussed on the communist terrorists we were focussed on the Indonesians. Then they started to make a few landings. We went to Borneo. We were deployed to Borneo in March of

14:30 1965. By that stage I had been promoted to captain and I worked most of the time as an operations officer in the command post. I was just on shift duty manning the telephones and doing pretty routine stuff. I didn't get involved in any of the actual operations that went on.

How did you find that sort of change in operations for yourself? Is it harder?

Much harder. I've always said

15:00 being a captain is the most useless rank because you are really in administrative duties and staff duties. You are in between. You are second in command or you are adjutant or you are doing something. You are working but you're not commanding. I personally would much prefer to have been out on patrols and things.

Do you find though in that position that you are finding out more about what's happening?

15:30 Certainly while you are working in the command post you have a good picture of the operations. At that time we were conducting what were called the Claret Operations, which were highly classified, and we were crossing the border and going into Indonesia. In the mornings we would have a briefing. We were based in a town called Bau. The local police chief and the local

16:00 public works chap used to come in and I think one or two others but I can't remember what functions they had. We would have a briefing of what had happened in the last twenty-four hours and where our patrols were on and so on and that was all on a blind. And when these other people would go the blind would go up and we'd have another briefing as to where the actual patrols where and what had happened there. It was a closely guarded secret. Even visitors from

16:30 visitors from Australia, army visitors from Australia, weren't privy to this. They would get the blind brief as we referred to it as rather than the real brief. Those that were out patrolling I think enjoyed it. It was good soldiering. The Indonesians, when they were ambushed, reacted very fiercely. There were some pretty close calls amongst those that had contacts there.

So obviously when that

17:00 **Confrontation started the level just went up several notches didn't it?**

Yes and it was interesting country too. The Dyaks were interesting people and the jungle was interesting. I went back there in 1992 on a visit and I flew over all the area we operated in and sadly most of it has been land cleared. It is really quite tragic to see what has happened. I don't know what has happened to all those Dyaks and whether they've just moved deeper into the jungle or what.

17:30 **Did you have any personal interaction with the Dyaks at the time you were there?**

Not a lot. You'd go through their villages from time to time there. They were remarkably strong guys. If you had an air drop – our bases were built on the top of sort of little hills and right on the border. And a space tended to be cleared below it and an air drop would come along and drop supplies and you had to carry it up the hill. We used to get these star pickets and the pickets would come in and they were quite heavy. It would usually take two of

18:00 us to carry them. You'd see these old Dyaks and they'd pick it up on one shoulder and actually run up, jog up, to the top of the hill. They had a lot of strength. A helicopter a dropped a load of corrugated iron as it was flying towards one of the bases. It was in short supply and I was sent to recover this. I got there and had to enter some negotiations with the head man. It was

18:30 obviously going to cost and we'd figured this would be a cost. He was a very skilful negotiator. Where it had been dropped he'd got all these men from the village to pick it up and move it about six hundred metres over to the other side of this steep ravine that had a rope bridge. So when we eventually negotiated the amount that I was authorised to pay to recover it

19:00 he then wanted an extra charge for the men to move it back to an area where we could get a helicopter in to pick it up again. He was a cunning old devil and of course he had me over a barrel and I had to agree. They were interesting. A lot of their villages had very intricate systems where they would tap into a creek using big bamboo pipes. You had big bamboo coming into the centre and then

19:30 they'd tap off that to individual houses. They had houses with bamboo stilts and the drainage through the bamboo slats on the floor so the drainage was dropping through. I suppose after a period of time they moved on to somewhere else.

In that time had you done your short trip to Vietnam to have a look?

Yes I'd been before. In December 1964 I went to Vietnam.

20:00 It was a policy for the officers to go on a two week visit so I went up there then. That was fascinating because we went up into the middle of the country into what was known as Tuy Hoa. The American advisers were there then as were some of ours but I didn't have any contact our guys. It was just fascinating to see what was happening. On one occasion we were

20:30 entertained for lunch in a tent on a big plateau by a regimental commander who was sort of like the equivalent of a brigadier of a brigade. He had a battalion up a valley being ambushed and taking quite heavy casualties. He had some guns that were around him that were all out of range. Apparently he appeared unconcerned about what was happening. The helicopter we had

21:00 used to come on the visit had taken off and flown up and brought back some American soldiers that had been wounded that were then laid out on this airstrip waiting for another aircraft to come and pick them up. I just thought the guns were out of range and there didn't seem to be anybody interested in moving it. The Americans couldn't get the commander to move and there obviously seemed to be a

21:30 lot of frustration and questionable confidence at that time. You saw several examples of that. We went up to visit the Montagnards. We were accompanying a team on a sort of health visit. They'd had some outbreak of a disease and we went up with them. I was with some American advisor. I was issued this

22:00 carbine and some ammunition. I can't answer it now, it just seems ridiculous to say it now but I didn't ever get anybody to show me how it worked. I wasn't worried particularly. Anyhow as it turns out we were ambushed as we were going up. I can remember bailing out of this jeep we were in and rolling over and getting into this ditch and getting this darned gun and thinking, "How does this work?"

22:30 And trying to figure it out on the spot. Anyway, the firing petered out and we all got back in the vehicles and continued on. I certainly when I got there got somebody to show me how to use that weapon. I had a pistol but it wasn't going to be a lot of use in a ditch. It was an interesting visit to see what was happening and to get a feel for it. I certainly came back and wrote a report that said

23:00 it was clear to me, a young captain with limited exposure, that unless American combat troops came in there was no question of the South ever being able to win the war.

Before you were sent there what did you know of what was happening there?

I had a reasonable idea. Dien Bien Phu had been reasonably covered. There had been books written about it and had covered that so there was an

23:30 understanding of what had happened in the war and what the war was about and the domino theory. So we had a good perspective of that. What I didn't have any perspective of was the confidence of the South Vietnamese military and I didn't have any feeling for their culture either. So that was interesting to just get a bit of a feel for that.

So ultimately what was the purpose

24:00 **of the trip?**

Familiarisation, just to get familiarisation.

So in retrospect do you think they were getting guys ready for a larger Australian complement?

I don't think so. No, we had already made a decision to commit advisors. The policy had been put into effect that people in Malaysia would make a familiarisation

24:30 visit because it was a different war and it was a good way to gain experience. So, no, there was no hidden agenda there. I'm quite sure of that.

Did you ever think at the time that there was a possibility you would –

Serving in the Training Team, yes. I would have been quite happy to go in the Training Team at any time. When we were still in Enoggera when they announced in 1962 that they were sending up the

25:00 Training Team and called for volunteers I would love to have gone but I was too junior in rank. And we were on warning to go to Malaysia. So they were telling us, "You can't go you are already going there." I would have happily gone if somebody had tapped me on the shoulder.

So even during the Confrontation were you finding out about other things that were happening?

In Vietnam?

Yes.

No, not a lot, no. The information wasn't getting back to us

25:30 as quickly as had we been in Australia.

So it was an initial two-year deployment to Malaysia?

Yes it was for a two-year period.

How did the Confrontation affect that?

It didn't. We did our routine change over with another battalion. That process just went on.

So were you

26:00 **happy to return to Australia or would you have liked to have stayed there?**

No, I was happy to go back. Two years was enough and things like a meat pie and some fresh milk were high priorities. It was a good time and it was a great learning experience. I had spent time in an Asian country and I was given an opportunity to understand the different culture particularly in the fact that they do not seek to embarrass anybody

26:30 and cause embarrassment by saying, "No" or whatever it is by giving offence there. Sometimes they will say, "Yes," when they mean "No." So it was good to see that and it was good to see the sort of terrain that you were working in. It was good to work with the other nations and get a feel for that inter-operability

27:00 and measure some standards of how you were going against the other nations as well.

So the battalion comes away from that experience a lot wiser?

Well you say that on the one hand and yes it does once it leaves the country. But what happened was when we came back of course most of the officers who, like myself, had been with the battalion for five years were sent off. The battalion and the soldiers were split. Some went to Woodside to stay with 3RAR and the others went to

27:30 Puckapunyal to form a new battalion, 7RAR, because we were expanding to go to Vietnam. So on the one hand you would say, "Yes, it was a very experienced and competent battalion at about the time it left but it was very quickly just dissipated throughout the rest of the army." That's right and proper. That experience was then just spread out through the army.

I'm assuming a core of experience does still stay with the battalion?

Yes, some do.

28:00 **So there is a downside, a flip side, to that moving of people every two years?**

That's right.

So where was it for you from there?

I went down to the Officer Cadet School at Portsea where I became the infantry instructor for a couple of years. That was good because we knew that we were training people that looked like they were going to go and serve in Vietnam. We had people serving in Vietnam at that time. It was good for

28:30 me because I'd come from military college and had all the theory and been out with a battalion for five years and it was time to go back and check the text books and apply the practical lessons back to the theory and teach others. That was a very rewarding experience. We were a whole group of young captains and we were all peers and we knew each other and had young families and it was a very happy time. We look back now at that as being a very

29:00 happy family time. It was a very busy time. We used to have to teach every lesson twice because they worked in half classes and it was not unusual for people to give twenty to thirty periods of instruction in a week.

If I can just get an idea – for a normal soldier they'd go and get their basic training and then they'd do their corps training so in their case they would do infantry training?

Yes.

When you go to

29:30 **Duntroon you basically do your basic training there as well as officer training. Whereabouts in there do you get your main infantry skill training like your corps training as an infanteer?**

At that time there wasn't. It was based on - the curriculum said to train an infantry platoon commander. So in theory a

30:00 graduate of the Royal Military College was trained to an infantry standard so there wasn't a requirement. However, in 1962 for example I was sent on a junior officers' course to give more specific training. Now they tend to send them to the Infantry Centre to give them a bit more of specific training.

So at the time you went through Duntroon that's where you got all your infantry training?

Yes. So that is how that worked.

30:30 Portsea was a very intense course. They worked hard at it. They were there for a year and it was a very hard year.

For people that don't know, the people that were coming through Portsea where were they all from?

They were mixed. There were those that were soldiers that had been selected for or applied for commission so there was that level of experience. There were some that had been to the army apprentices' school and had joined the army at

31:00 fifteen and worked up a trade and were then coming in. The others had come off the street. They had been in the army reserve or they'd been at university and didn't like it. There were quite a percentage that didn't have any military experience. It was a complex mix but it was a very intense twelve months. We pushed them together and worked them hard and then they'd come out and get on with it.

It seems interesting that you can make a

31:30 **comparison between that sort of training that they had at Portsea compared to Duntroon?**

Yes. At Duntroon the comparison was there was a lot more academic study through it and the process of the military training went over time. So it was reinforced and reinforced and gradually expanded whereas it was a compressed course at Portsea. It was do this module and then move on, move on and move on.

32:00 I think one of the weaknesses is that there wasn't time for people to catch up. People fell by the wayside where perhaps if it hadn't have been so intense there might have been an opportunity to catch a bit of time. There was certainly the option of repeating a year. We would even send people off on leave if they were injured and those sort of things.

Is there a different regard in the army for Portsea trained blokes as opposed to Duntroon?

There was in certain perceptions. Of course they wore a

32:30 different rank. They were second lieutenants with only one pip for three years and then became a lieutenant at the same time. So if you both entered the army on the same day you both got to be a full lieutenant on the same day. The difference was that one fellow had three years' practical experience out there and that was pretty fundamental.

33:00 **Do you think that worked?**

Yes it did help. I don't think over time it mattered much. It was said that the prospects of Portsea graduates getting promotion was limited. And it was limited because the Duntroon officers controlled it all and they weren't going to let them and they didn't have academic training. That wasn't really it at all.

33:30 It was the fact that they were generally older when they were going there and often they would run out of time in the sense that they were too old to meet the promotion the promotion zone. The other thing that tended to happen was because a lot of them didn't have the academic training as they got up to the higher level, the middle level officer ranks, they found it a bit more difficult to

34:00 analyse things and staff and impress. They could do the work but it was more difficult for them to impress the seniors that wanted to promote them. As time passed the differences became less and less and less.

How was it for you – even in Malaya you said on that exercise where you didn't get your drop and you were really testing yourself and here you are

34:30 **training future officers, was that something you had to adjust to?**

I was really confident about it. I had five years training and I figured I knew what infantry soldiering was all about and I was ready to train them. I was certainly I think a pretty hard taskmaster in terms of standards but we'd come back very confident about it. We worked hard and were very

35:00 anxious. I think there was this sense of responsibility that we had that within a year the people we were training would be in Vietnam commanding soldiers in action. We wanted to do everything we possibly could to make sure they were as could be and that soldiers' lives were not going to be lost through any incompetence on our part. That was the cut and thrust of it basically.

Was it interesting that you were training blokes to lead other men in

35:30 **Vietnam – you'd want to be there as well?**

Sure. We were breaking our neck to get there. One thing I should say is you must remember there was a high sense of motivation amongst the cadets too because they knew they were going to be there so

they were keen to learn as well. It wasn't a one way process. They were equally looking to soak up as much knowledge as they could.

People always question, "Why do you want to go to war?" but if you can

36:00 **explain as a practical soldier what it is all about –**

The analogy I've used sometimes to civilian friends or relatives who ask me that is if you can picture a dentist and you go off to the dentistry school and the college and you learn. And you practice on models and you see it all on the movies and you've got all these instruments and you keep pulling teeth out of a dummy. You just were looking forward to the day when here is a real, live

36:30 breathing patient and you are going to get the tooth and pull it out or drill into it. That is what going on operational service and the analogy really is. You have been trained all your life to go and fight a war and here is the chance and you're going on active service.

In a probably not so related manner but when I was thinking before of your service in Malaya when you were married and had a child did that change you as an officer?

Very much so.

37:00 It is a very stabilising influence because for a start you are going home to your wife of a night and not staying in a mess and drinking and playing cards and just generally 'yahooing' as a young single fellow. Yes, that certainly I think brings about that kind of sense of responsibility and awareness of your family.

37:30 I think it probably makes you also a bit more aware of the pressures on married people. If I appear to be qualifying that it is because if you recall very few of the soldiers in those days were married, most lived in, so it wasn't generally a big issue. It was the NCOs that tended to be married and have children.

You spoke of the bonding that you have

38:00 **when you are forced together in that environment that you had in Duntroon and the same would go for the other ranks as well. How important is it when you are in a battalion that the bonding of the officers with the bonding they would normally have in the officers' mess at night and that sort of thing?**

I think it is important but not critical. It is important. You can learn from each other and discuss things with each other

38:30 but also you can tolerate differences and it not be critical. There is what the army refers to as "esprit de corps" a feeling of spirit within the unit. You are trying to build up unit pride and that must flow from the officers. The officers must give that impression that they are proud to serve in this unit. They are not only proud to serve in that unit they are happy to be there and they want every

39:00 soldier to be proud to serve in the unit and they don't want to let it down.

I'm guessing there would still be a social thing with the officers and their families and that sort of thing?

Yes, very much so. There were a number of mess functions and particularly regimental messes where they are younger families and younger folk where they tended to have family type activities as opposed to headquarters who were more senior and older people where it was probably

39:30 less the case. There were still a number of fixed functions.

People who have spoken to is about how at that time the Australian Army was relatively small and it was a close knit family?

It was a close knit family and we all tended to know one another or know of somebody. If you hadn't met somebody you would have heard of them. That is so. If you think back the army was in those days when I joined it

40:00 just a little bit smaller than it is now but it only had three battalions. So you just obviously knew everybody. The times were different too. I think there were less distractions. We tended to live in and we tended not to have cars. There wasn't so much emphasis on television in those days so you tended to do things and

40:30 talk more and discuss things. There was more time than rushing about now and getting your information off the internet or whatever it is that you do. There was more daily interaction between people in the course of the day's events.

Tape 5

00:35 **Was there a story you had at Portsea about meeting the Duke of Edinburgh?**

Well he came to the colours parade and presented the colours to the college and I was the adjutant essentially involved in organising the parade for about six months. So he came out and presented the colours. That's the story.

When you were saying at Duntroon that at the passing out parade there would always be a

01:00 **dignitary there, was that significantly more exciting for the men having royalty there?**

I think for the cadets it was. It was a big occasion for a college. They had not been presented with colours before. It was the first time they had been presented with colours, prior to that they just had the national flag which they took on parades. So that was a very significant event in the history of the college. It recognised its importance and status.

01:30 There was nowhere really suitable either to have it down at the college being a small area. So it was decided to have it up at Melbourne which presented a few administrative challenges but it was good and a good crowd watched it and it went well. It was a very successful parade.

Did you meet him?

Yes, just briefly. I had met him and the Queen previously when I was serving in Malaya so it wasn't the first occasion.

02:00 **When had you met them in Malaya?**

They made a visit out to Terendak at some stage. I can't recall when but they visited us and we met them at a mess function and I spoke briefly to them.

A lot of the World War II fellows that we speak to speak about joining up for King and Country. When you were going through and when you had cadets coming through did you notice a similar

02:30 **feeling for Queen and Country?**

No. It was a different scenario I think from the World War scenario where there was a definite threat to the country and they were enlisting to fight that specific war, it was a different scenario. The notion of serving the country, yes, you joined the armed forces for that specific reason and that is to serve the country and to defend the country.

03:00 I wouldn't use the words for Queen and Country in the same context that they used it.

So your time at Portsea, how did that come to an end?

I was posted to 5RAR which was due to go back on its second tour of Vietnam. My time at Portsea was up. I had done my two years instructing and six months as adjutant. I was

03:30 promoted to the rank of major and I actually marched into Holsworthy on the 18th of June, 1968 and that was the day the company was formed. The battalion had served in Vietnam in 1966/1967 and came home and then of course was dissipated again into just a shell. One of the other battalions received priority and it was being built up again. I went to

04:00 command D Company and there was the company sergeant major and the corporal clerk and myself. That was about it at the start of it.

When you were talking earlier about when you first went to 3RAR and the sort of reputation they had, what was the reputation of 5RAR?

5RAR didn't have a particular reputation. It was known as the tiger battalion because their first CO had adopted the tiger as a mascot. The Sumatran tiger at the

04:30 Taronga Park Zoo was the battalion's mascot. It had a gold or yellow lanyard and so there was some appeal about having a tiger as a mascot and the gold and yellow but it hadn't – in its first tour it was only formed – it was only three years old. It had one tour of duty in Vietnam and it was there at the same time that 6RAR was there and had fought the Battle of Long Tan and got all the

05:00 kudos so 5RAR had no particular image so to speak.

At the time that you were sent back to a battalion were you happy to see your time as an instructor and an adjutant come to an end?

Yes. I was ready to move on, (a) I had been there for a period of time and (b) I'd been promoted and (c) I was going to Vietnam. That was it.

05:30 I was worried that the war might finish before we got there.

How many men would have come under your command at that point?

That's an interesting point. A company is normally a hundred and twenty people in round figures. In my time over that period about three hundred and fifty people served in D Company, 5RAR. The reason for those figures is threefold. One

06:00 is you obviously lose people in action either killed or wounded and they have to be replaced. Secondly, there was national service and the government's policy, and I think a correct and wise policy, was to maximise the exposure of national servicemen to operations in Vietnam. That meant that you had a large residue of combat experienced soldiers to defend the country if called upon. What it meant though was that there was a constant turnover.

06:30 For instance when we went to Vietnam about twenty soldiers joined my company from the battalion we were replacing who I had never met. And about three months after we got there a batch went home because their two years was up. So that constantly went on over time. The third reason that I spoke of was just the rotation of people going on courses

07:00 and injuries and the normal turbulence you get. What that means in effect is, we talked earlier about the importance of bonding and teamwork and being together for long periods of time, that meant it was more difficult to achieve then, that sense. It wasn't like 4RAR in Malaya where we had been together for a number of years. We came together and worked ourselves up for about six months and then thereafter was a constant change of people.

07:30 To compensate for that you had to have a good set of operating procedures so people could come in and understand the operating procedures and do their job and have a reasonably tight hold on what was happening. To some extent the degree to which you delegated authority and freedom of action at the lower

08:00 level was a bit more restricted than perhaps if everybody had been together over a longer period of time and you had confidence in the working relationships. Having said all that the team did remarkably well given those circumstances.

So when you first marched in to 5RAR where were they based?

They were based at Holsworthy in a relatively new barracks just south of Sydney in the training area there. What happened was we got a

08:30 bunch of reinforcements and we started to do the training of them ourselves. They had done some recruit training and we gave them the infantry-type training for that. Then more people arrived. There was a gradual influx of officers and NCOs and we built it up. We then went out on some low level exercises and gradually built up to some bigger exercises. We went to Canungra for a month and were

09:00 trained there as a company. Each company went through Canungra and that was a testing period. We virtually had people checking us all the way and seeing how we were going. There was a major battalion exercise late in '68 up at Shoalwater Bay. The battalion didn't come out of it with as good a report as we were expecting to get. One of the things that did bother us was it was very hot and dry and we had a few

09:30 acclimatisation problems. And I think the other difficulty we had was the way the exercise was controlled and ran didn't seem to relate as well to service in Vietnam that we were expecting. So I think there were some misunderstandings along the way there but we were certified as being able to operate and away we went.

When you spoke of Canungra being used as almost a testing

10:00 **ground, did anyone fail that testing?**

They did. Certainly in our battalion of the four rifle companies two of the company commanders were posted out of the battalion as a result of their company's performance up at Canungra which obviously wasn't at the required standard. I wasn't there and don't know the circumstances other than it happened.

How does that affect morale within the battalion?

I

10:30 don't think it affected it significantly in the sense that there was so much turbulence going on that people hadn't quite got used to or locked in on the one leader. And the other thing was because of the urgency of going to war the priority was they wanted competency in leaders and not necessarily liking them or popularity or anything else they wanted to make sure there was a degree of competency. I

11:00 think the message of a few officers being removed let the soldiers know that the system was making sure that they were well led by competent people. It wasn't as disruptive as you might think. It was disappointing for the individuals concerned certainly but not as disruptive as it might appear.

When you first went to 5RAR were there National Servicemen there?

Not when I

11:30 arrived because there wasn't anybody in my company but, yes, they came in straight after that.

What was your opinion of the National Servicemen?

They were good. I think you could sense a slight bit of difference because there was a little more maturity. There was less of an acceptance of the regulations. In other words they weren't in any way indoctrinated so to speak. They came from a wider background.

12:00 They were happy to get on and learn and fit in. At the end of the tour you couldn't tell the difference between who was who. You wouldn't have been able to go along the line and say, "He's this and he's that." There was no way of knowing then. They did remarkably well. There was just a vast variety of people. If you looked at the regular army, the regular army tends to come from a lot of

12:30 country folk and people who are not doing any form of tertiary study and trade training and night school and that sort of thing. So you tend to have just by the structure of our society people as I said country folk, mainly of Caucasian background because a lot of migrants who have come in are either involved in family businesses or going to night school or doing some sort of educational course. National Servicemen were different.

13:00 They came from all walks of life so you automatically then had cast the net wider, at a wider spectrum.

Some of the soldiers that we have spoken to on both sides of the fence have told us about the friendly niggling that goes on between Nashos and regulars, what was your view of that?

It was understandable and I think healthy ribbing. On the one hand there were

13:30 those that said, "We are the professionals. We are here and we know it all and you fellows are just passing through and you can't possibly meet our standard." That is understandable. That is our nature too. It's Australia's way of doing things. Underlying all that was a good strong sense of teamwork. I know of no specific occasion where such an argument resulted in any serious matter like a disciplinary offence or a fight or anything like

14:00 that. Mostly it was good-natured chiacking [teasing]. I think one of the areas that probably concerned the National Servicemen was the attitude of the NCOs. The NCOs I think were initially a bit sceptical and saw that these fellows hadn't spent enough time to be at a high standard. NCOs are charged with the

14:30 preservation of the standards of basic soldiering like drill and keeping your weapon and looking after our equipment and those sort of things. That is their charter and that's what they are there for. So they would view naturally with some suspicion people coming in that aren't professionals. But by the second tour the NCOs that were serving in my company most of them had been to Vietnam as private

15:00 soldiers and had been promoted to do this. So they were used to working with national servicemen and they themselves were new in the rank. They didn't have this big long career behind them either. I didn't see a lot of that going on other than good-natured, healthy chiacking between the two groups.

Did you encounter any National Servicemen that clearly didn't want to be there?

One or two. Certainly a number of them

15:30 would say, "I just can't wait to get out of here and finish this service." In fact, most of them had that view. But that didn't in any way denigrate from their performance as soldiers or disrupt their teamwork or anything else. In fact one of my replacement officers who joined me very early in the piece he was the most

16:00 physically uninspiring fellow. He was of small stature and untidily dressed and a bit slouched and slim. He let it be known to me in our initial interview that he wasn't at all happy to be (a) a National Servicemen and (b) certainly risking his neck in Vietnam. I was a little bit concerned about this and thought, "What am I going to do with this

16:30 guy. He's gong to be in charge of all these people." He turned out to be a brilliant officer and very brave in several instances. He was badly wounded at one stage and had the option of returning to Australia but he stayed on. He captured the hearts of his platoon. They followed him willingly and confidently. So that just gives you an example.

In those early days though did the National Servicemen

17:00 **need more discipline?**

I didn't think so. The standard of discipline in operations is different from the standard in the barracks. I think you could mix up the two. The way that I'm trying to explain this would be some of the National Servicemen in my company were promoted to NCOs. You would say, there was a term we used

17:30 "Good in the Bush." So they would know how to supervise things in the field and make sure the routines worked and security was right and sentries were posted and guns were cleaned and all those things that happened. But get them back out of the bush and make them the orderly corporal where they've got responsibilities for checking routine things, that the kitchen is clean and the cooks have put everything away and making sure there is a runner there to answer the phone.

18:00 They were less good at that. They were less interested and less good at it rather than the regular who is trained at it and knows what he's got to do. That's the difference as I perceived it to be. In the field they

were confident. They didn't have to know everything. All they had to do was to know how to fight that particular war for that year in Vietnam. They didn't need to know a lot about how to do funeral rules because hopefully they weren't going to go to a funeral or to major ceremonial parade. It wasn't

18:30 going to happen there as opposed to the regular soldier who had this maybe twenty-year span and knew if he needed to get up to be a corporal and a sergeant he had to have a multitude of experience and do things. They didn't have to have that range of ability they were just there to fight the war and get on with it. So the knowledge that they needed to do their job was in a narrow range if that makes sense to you.

What sort of

19:00 **discussions did you have with your wife about you heading off to Vietnam?**

I think we had several. She, of course, was not happy about me going. We had a young family and she was naturally concerned that I mightn't come home but she understood that as a professional soldier I wanted to go and that if I didn't get there and she was implicated in the reasons for me not getting there then I would probably retain some

19:30 resentment about that. So I think she took a pragmatic view of, you know, "Go." That would be a fair summary.

How old were your boys at this stage?

Let me see. They were about seven and five and my daughter would have been two.

What sort of

20:00 **questions did they have for you about where you were going?**

Not a lot. I had spent a large part of that time going away. It was, "Is Daddy going away again?" The family went home. My wife went back to Perth because her parents were elderly and they were both frail and her mother had a bad heart. So she went back to Perth and my

20:30 family were there as well. So she had family support. We rented a house just down the road from where one of her sisters lived so there were lots of cousins and family support for my wife when I was away which I was very thankful for.

As a child when your brothers were going off to war obviously you were too young to be having any sort of in depth conversations with them about it?

Yes.

Did that change before you went to Vietnam?

Did I want have

21:00 in depth conversations with my sons you mean?

No, with your brothers?

No I didn't because they were spread around. A couple were in Melbourne and the rest of the family were in Perth but, no, I didn't have any lengthy conversations with them about that. I had a long talk with my father over that Christmas break about going to war and if anything happened to my family I'd be seeking for

21:30 him to help out as best he could which he understood and willingly said he would. That was all.

As opposed to when you went to Malaya did your dad have any other advice for you?

No I don't think so, not by that stage of the game. I think he saw that I had been there for a while and was trained and knew what I was doing.

22:00 No, nothing in particular.

So when would you have said goodbye to your family? Did you get pre-embarkation leave?

Yes, we had a break over Christmas and moved to the west. We moved in and I got them set up. I think I left around about the middle of January to go back to Holsworthy. We had a farewell parade and then left to go to Vietnam on the 29th of January I think it was that we

22:30 flew out. We were in the advance party. So we went up there and spent some time with the people that we were replacing. So we went out on a couple of little overnight operations to get a feel for the place before the main body arrived about two weeks later.

So leaving Perth to go back to Holsworthy how difficult was that to say goodbye?

It's very difficult to say goodbye to your family not knowing when you're going to see them again or if you're going to see them again.

23:00 It is a very difficult thing to do.

Did you discuss that reality with them?

No. I could see no value in talking about it. To me that was a very negative way to look at it. I always had been optimistic in the sense that nothing would happen to me. I wasn't worried so much about being killed. You can't do anything about that. I think the thing in the back of all soldiers' minds was being

23:30 maimed somehow or losing a limb or that level of disability. That was the major concern. And that's not something that you want to dwell on and not something that you want to talk about. You want to say to your family, "This is okay. Sure it is a risky place but I'm well trained and I won't do anything that is silly. I'll be back." That was the attitude that I took.

Did any of your

24:00 **friends or family give you any kind of good luck token?**

No, nothing. Oddly enough the one thing that happened is my brother-in-law had a good investment and he urged me to take up that investment. We didn't have a lot of money in those days. I could have put the money in but I thought, "Oh, this isn't fair. If I put that in and something does happen to me my wife will need that money." And I didn't and as it turned out that was a very good

24:30 investment. I would have been a bit richer had I followed that up but that's life.

So in the preparation in those few days before you actually left how were your thoughts different than say when you went to Malaya about the responsibility that you had for your men actually leading them into somewhere where you know you're in a war?

I think it was very different for the reasons that you had more men for a start

25:00 and you knew definitely you were going into action in that sense. You wanted to do everything you could possibly do to make sure that if anybody lost their life it wasn't as a result of your incompetency or lack of knowledge. I think that was the difference and it was a very intense period. My wife will tell you that I think in about the five months that we lived in Holsworthy when they came up. They didn't come up straight away because we

25:30 again couldn't get a house. It was one of those times while all this was going on in the war I had to still go and find a place to live in. We weren't allocated married quarters originally and I had left the card with them. So in a very limited time, I had the weekend – I'm digressing again – I eventually found a house. I had to pay something like $three hundred and fifty dollars which was a lot of money in 1968 as rent in advance. I went back to

26:00 Portsea and drove up with the family and the day we arrived we were told, "You've been allocated a married quarter." Now if we had not moved into the married quarter I wouldn't have got any rental assistance which meant I would have been paying exorbitant market rates and couldn't afford it. So we spent one night camped in that house and then went to this terrible married quarter which was just an awful place.

26:30 That's an example. And then it was, "There's a house. See you later. I'm off to the war." My wife says I spent about twenty-three or twenty-seven nights in that house in five months. So that was the intensity of the training and getting ready to go.

As a leader of men when you know you are heading into a war zone you sort of

27:00 **mentioned there are things you kind of know but you don't let yourself think about. Do you actually think, "I know I'm going to lose some men?"**

I think at the back of your mind there is that acceptance that the prospects are high that somebody is going to be killed. You hope it doesn't happen but it's there. That knowledge is there.

27:30 **Having that kind of knowledge there what does that do to you?**

It is just an acceptance of the reality of what war is about in the sense that does it make you more cautious or something like that? No, otherwise you'd be paralysed and you wouldn't do anything if you were worried about that. One thing that soldiers expect from their leaders is confidence.

28:00 They would tolerate perhaps some unpredictability and they might tolerate some outbursts of temper but the one thing they want is confidence. They want to see you competent and confident in leading them and not displaying signs of fear or uncertainty in an action. In certain situations they look to you to reassure themselves that they're going to get out of this.

28:30 So you can't dwell on those thoughts and feelings. If you do you then suffer from paralysis by analysis and you will be a hopeless battlefield leader.

At any time before you left – some soldiers have spoken to us about officers giving them a speech about the seriousness of going to Vietnam and that some of them will be killed and

wounded? Did you ever have to give that speech or be present at one?

29:00 Yes, I talked to the company several times about those issues. I talked about that fact that the chances were there and there was a good chance that that was going to happen and the need for us to stick together and to help one another. I was reinforcing the team work issues and reinforcing the fact that it was a dangerous place and trying to impress on people that we weren't playing

29:30 games this was a very serious matter.

How much information did you have about what kind of operations you would be doing and where you would be based?

We knew where we were going to be based. We had had regular reports back from the battalion we were replacing. We had access to their after action reports. The commanding officer had been up on a visit so we had pretty good knowledge of what was happening in the war at that

30:00 time. Of course what happened was the war slightly changed. The first parts of the war were more the task force establishing itself in the Phuoc Tuy Province and establishing authority and being involved initially in defeating the enemy forces operating there. And then getting out and seeking to assert some influence on the population and

30:30 spreading it out. By the time we got there that had all been achieved. What had happened was that other main force units were coming down and the nature of the war was more main force units from the north were down. So we were more involved in patrolling and searching for these main force units and engaging them and seeking still to dominate our areas. A lot of the training we did in things like

31:00 cordon and searches and those things we didn't get to apply so much in Vietnam because the nature of operations changed.

When you say the main force units is that NVA [North Vietnamese Army]?

Yes, NVA.

What differences – what was your understanding of the differences between VC [Viet Cong] and NVA?

Well there were like two levels of enemy. There were the local villagers that operated in and around the

31:30 village and they were sort of semi soldiers but hidden away and by day they were doing their thing in the village as the local infrastructure group. Then there were the local units and these were made up of people who lived in the district but formed units and lived in camps in the bush. And that was what was generally known as the VC and then there was the NVA, the regular North Vietnamese units, who were well

32:00 trained and well equipped. They were obviously away from their families. They were very aggressive soldiers and they were prepared to fight hard as we understood it.

And those three levels, were you aware of that before you got there?

Yes. The same sort of levels applied pretty much to the South Vietnamese as well.

Did you

32:30 **have a different regard for each of the three levels?**

Well, yes and no. We understood they were all capable but they were all threats. And we didn't know usually at the time of initiating a contact who we were fighting. It was often not clear until after the battle or for some time after the battle had been joined as to who you were fighting. So in that

33:00 sense you wouldn't prepare any differently. If somebody is shooting at you, you react in a set way no matter what force he belongs to.

What about your own personal feelings. Did you feel differently about them?

No, not at all. They were the enemy and that was it. They were just a different type of enemy.

At the time that you were leaving what was the public opinion on the war at that stage?

It was

33:30 turning against it and it continued to turn against it while we were there. Certainly from time to time we would get newspaper clippings that soldiers would find a bit disturbing and upsetting. It would upset them to see that there were demonstrations or there would be stories about soldiers being spat on, on return, and that sort of thing. But I think you had to look at in the

34:00 context that, just generalising here, we tended to be out in the field for about four to six weeks and come back and quickly retrain. We'd do maybe a two or three day operation in between that a day or two off resting and be off again. There wasn't a lot of time to sit back and reflect and worry about what was happening back here.

Did it make leaving Australia any more difficult?

Not for me, no.

34:30 I don't think for the others. There would have been individuals I'm sure that served in my company that were opposed to the war and certainly therefore didn't want to be there. I can certainly recall some conversations with soldiers who had that view but as I said earlier it didn't in anyway disrupt their ability to perform as a soldier. You had to respect an individual's

35:00 right to form his own views.

Operating as such a close knit team and the absolute necessity of that, when you find out that someone doesn't want to be there does it initially instil any level of distrust?

I don't think so in the sense that it's a hard question for me to answer because tat happens at the soldier level and

35:30 something is said there. I'm not operating at that level and I was never privy to those kinds of conversations. I think there was a general acceptance that provided the fellow was competent in what he was doing and carried his place in the team then he could have any view he wanted. It was more important though that he did his share and he wasn't a 'jack man' [someone who avoids work]. If you were out on sentry and you came back that your brew was there made and hot and ready for you. That was far more

36:00 important in terms of measuring the capability of the next man and he's an effective member of the team.

Can you tell us about the day you left?

The day I actually left? I can remember going out to the airport to have a couple of beers with a couple of my mates who came to see me off, a couple of Duntroon class mates. We had a couple of beers at the airport. We left in civilian clothes because we were going through Singapore.

36:30 As I understood it to be it was so we weren't seen to be deploying out of Singapore. It was just a stop over and we were on a Qantas charter. And between Singapore and Saigon we changed into uniform. We were met at Tan Son Nhut, at the airport and taken straight up to Nui Dat.

37:00 I should recount a story back in the first time I went there back in 1964. You have probably never heard of a fellow called Paul Rigby who was a famous cartoonist and he started originally in Perth. He always drew Americans that had rows and rows of ribbons and a big fat cigar and sunglasses and a pearl-handled pistol tied down, American servicemen. And blow me down when I got out of the aircraft at Tan Son Nhut here was this sergeant at the end of it and he was just

37:30 like Rigby drew them. He had ribbons and sunglasses and the pistol tied down to the thigh and the cigar and the whole lot. I was never too sure whether that guy was there for the image meeting all us innocent Australians coming in or whether he was fair dinkum but there he was. Anyway, I digress.

While you're on the subject of the Americans, when you were actually heading over there with 5RAR did you know that you would have any involvement or was there any plan of involvement with the

38:00 **Americans?**

We weren't expecting to have. They were there but we weren't expecting to have any major involvement with them. They did provide heavy artillery support to us, you know, the big guns that fired along the ranges because we didn't have them. As it turned out not long after I was there I had an American forward observer for a period of time from that battery. He worked with us and he was very good and a nice fellow. I don't remember, to my chagrin, his

38:30 surname. Sandy was his preferred Christian name. He was a heck of a nice guy. He had the most amazing ability. He seemed to amble along without looking at a map or a compass and when we'd stop and I'd ask him where we were he'd put his finger pretty well where I thought we were.

During that first trip, that first two week trip, what opinion did you form of the Americans?

In the first?

In the first familiarisation trip that you did?

39:00 I didn't see enough of them. They struck me as being enthusiastic and confident. I didn't see enough to form any strong opinions about them one way or the other. They were certainly committed to the cause of trying to instruct the Vietnamese and they appeared to be very professional. The couple of officers that we

39:30 spoke to were frustrated at their inability to influence the Vietnamese to do things the way they wanted them to do it. They were my impressions.

When you went over with the advance party who else was on your flight?

Most of the other company commanders and COs and some administrative people. It was the normal thing and there was a group of about twenty or thirty of us I guess.

And on the rest of the plane?

40:00 They would have been routine reinforcements I imagine going up. It might have been people coming back from leave or I have no idea really.

What was the mood like on the flight?

My mood was pretty relaxed. I don't recall anything special about it. I think we left in the middle of the day. Again it was a timing thing to get into Tan Son Nhut during the

40:30 day and I just don't recall what the timings were. We flew straight through from Sydney and landed at Singapore to refuel and then continued on. I'm pretty sure I had a good sleep on the plane so I couldn't have been that unsettled.

Was it the last good sleep you had for a while?

No. I slept reasonably well out of operations in base camp. When you are on operations of course there are

41:00 lots of things disturbing your sleep. I found if anybody came anywhere near me I would be instantly awake not for fear of being attacked but because I knew somebody would be bringing me a message or doing something. I endeavoured when I was on operations whenever it was possible I always slept with my head facing north so if I was woken at any time I was immediately pointing at it.

41:30 Sometimes it wasn't possible. If you were on a steep hill like that obviously you couldn't achieve that but wherever it was possible that was what I always tried to do.

Tape 6

00:30 **It would be good to know what your first impressions of Vietnam were when you landed. Did you land at Tan Son Nhut?**

Tan Son Nhut, yes. It was a big, busy air base. There were aircraft everywhere and people everywhere. I think it was what you expected. Nui Dat was bigger than what I thought it was. Our company lines were up on what was called Nui Dat Hill which was up on the top. They were surprisingly comfortable.

01:00 They had twelve by fourteen tents with sandbags around them but we had a little separate mess hall and the kitchen was well built. So while it was basic it was still not total field conditions as such. It was quite reasonable.

And what did you do for that first two weeks that you were up on the advance party?

We went out on a couple of small patrols just as a member of the patrol and getting familiarisation. One of the things that happened was the

01:30 ammunition dump blew up. There was some leaking white phosphorous mortar around. The ammunition dump was just around the back from our lines, between where we were and where the SAS [Special Air Services] was camped. I happened to be in the camp at that time. There weren't many people around. I finished up helping the staff sergeant move a lot of this ammunition on the day out of the way while there was shot and shell going off. At the time I didn't think it was terribly dangerous but later on when I spoke with

02:00 him about what had happened and the risk associated with it, it was quite a hazardous thing. I didn't understand that at the time or I would have been a bit more worried about it. He was a very brave man that fellow and he eventually got a medal for his efforts because he rushed in amongst it and moved a lot of stuff that could have easily caused a massive explosion.

And the leaking of the white phosphorous from those rounds?

They were just some rounds. It was a

02:30 temperature thing and they had been there for a while out in the temperature and that was one of the consequences of it.

Did you find that the rest of the time there you had similar issues with the humidity and the temperature?

With the operation of equipment from time to time there were some issues. You had to be therefore very careful about it. It depended also what season it was, whether it was the set season or dry season.

Did you pick up another twenty blokes that were already floating around?

03:00 They were already floating around. They were serving in the 1st Battalion. They were in D Company in the 1st Battalion. So they were actually in the lines and when that battalion flew off to Sydney they came to join us. And obviously that would have been difficult for them because they would have fitted in to another organisation and been used to that and then they had to come over and fit in as the minority group

03:30 into some new folk.

So they were all nashos [National Service soldiers]?

Yes, they were all National Service. There may have been one or two regulars for reasons that I can't recall but, yes, they were pretty much all nashos.

I suppose in a way it was pretty handy to have a handful of –

It was. They were an experienced group that provided some handy experience to the platoon.

Did you have any time with the national servicemen coming going did you have the problem that you had to train them in the country?

04:00 That is a good point. I think it was one of the complaints that we would have had that there was never enough time for retraining. And it might surprise you to hear me say this but in my view the standard of training was higher when we arrived than when we left. That is a mixture of the fact that there was a high turnover and there was an

04:30 inability to say, "Hang on. Stop the war for a little while and we'll go out and correct all these faults." So that was difficult. It was brought about by the longer you spend in a battlefield the more cautious you become and you are therefore less of the mind to take some risks. You therefore are less likely to manoeuvre and fire and manoeuvre is what good infantry

05:00 tactics is about. What was happening was there tended to be a lot more fire and less movement over risk minimisation strategy which is not necessarily a good tactic.

So on operations you need to keep that training up?

Yes, you did and we didn't have enough time to do that. There were little things that happened and I'll give you two examples of the problems that you encounter. One was we were having a

05:30 series of contacts at night time of enemy approaching our position on a track and being fired on at short notice and being missed basically. We couldn't work it out. There is a natural tendency to fire high but in this case these were sentries lying behind a machine gun on a tripod and ready to go. We discovered what the problem was and it was the guys that were on sentry at night time

06:00 just to occupy their time I suppose and their thoughts, would move the range dial, the knob on the sights. You would do it by clicking so you know that you're moving it at night time because you can hear it. They would do a couple of clicks and back. What was happening was that they weren't getting it right and over time the sights would move. I actually happened to be there one evening when this happened and I could see the soldiers'

06:30 gun lined up and the rounds just went off to the right. And these two lucky enemy scurried away. And when we looked at the sights you could see they were out of whack. The other example I could give you was there was this ambush that was very well set by one of my platoons. We encountered a well worn track during the day. We were in a base where we were protecting American bulldozers that were doing land clearing. They were out doing their land clearing during the

07:00 day and I sent this patrol out. They said, "There's a really fresh track and there's a lot of enemy movement backwards and forwards." I said, "Right, put an ambush in." The platoon commander had a section of about nine men that he set up on the track and then he deployed the rest of his platoon about a hundred metres further back all ready to go. What happened was the enemy came along and there was a security party, as you'd expect, which the first group engaged and

07:30 killed them all. At that time they were going to engage the others. They had all been bunched up because one of the lead people in the main group had been caught on some bamboo spikes and they were all nose to tail. So they went to fire the Claymores [mines] and they did it and instead of there being a loud blast of the Claymores all that happened was a faint "slap" sort of a noise. And what had happened was an

08:00 NCO had come in and joined the company I think a day or three days before that from another company. He had set up the Claymores and instead of inserting what was called a detonator with the fuse cord in it that would cause the detonation. He didn't know that he just put the fuse cord in and caused the Claymore mine to split rather than to detonate. So

08:30 there were probably thirty or forty lucky Vietnamese that may still be alive today that may not normally have been as a consequence. So they are two examples of that. He just hadn't been trained on the Claymore. He hadn't been picked up and trained.

So when you find out something like that has happened does someone get their butt kicked for that?

He didn't do it deliberately. It was disappointing all round. He felt bad about it too. Everybody felt

09:00 bad about it but it wasn't something that require disciplinary action. It was a matter of going back and saying, "Let's make sure everybody knows how to set up the Claymore again."

When you were talking about the M60 and the dial and the sight on it. What sort of range would a M60 in that position at Nui Dat, as a strong point, what range would you normally have set on a machine gun like that?

Well its standard sighting is a matter

09:30 of where you are lining it up there but it is normally set on about three hundred [metres]. That is standard where the round will go on the trajectory that it comes out right and it is capable of going at a sufficient height not to deviate much at short range as opposed to pulling it back to an eight hundred metre shot where you've got a much higher elevation. And it is technically possible to shoot over the top of somebody in front of you.

10:00 **Then the rest of the blokes arrival from Sydney – what was it like having to deal with all that?**

There was no problem. They came in smoothly and we were all organised and ready for them and had allocated people their tents and all that stuff. That is routine military business. That is routine military business. It is no different from going on an excise or moving from here to here. That's routine business. We spent some time acclimatising and

10:30 training and then we went out on an exercise in the local area up near the hills, the hills just to the west of Nui Dat. We had a contact very early in the piece. An amusing story about this is one of the fellows who was a

11:00 National Serviceman and quite a character and has subsequently become a well known Vietnam veteran and was decorated later. He was wounded a few times. Once he got there he wanted to apply for transfer to the US [United States] Marines and get up north to get stuck in to some real fighting as he said. So on the first night out he was on the machine gun and he stayed up all night waiting for this contact. The platoon did have a contact

11:30 and so it is said, I was not there but this is the folklore of that platoon, the enemy came in and this guy had been awake all night and refused relief. "I'm staying here with this gun." They tiptoed over him, he was fast asleep. And they got into the middle of the area where they were sprung and shot. Whether that was true or not I don't know but that was the interesting story. That highlights the expectation of that

12:00 first contact. I think there is that sense of anticipation, you know, that exhilaration that at long last we are out here to do what we've come to do. But there is also that apprehension about, "How will I perform when I'm in the battlefield?" And that underlying fear of being shot potentially.

During that acclimatisation period are you

12:30 **doing just clearing patrols close to the camp?**

Local clearing patrols and training inside and just getting that familiarisation with the terrain and in the weather and getting acclimatised.

Did you have to reposition any gun points or perimeter defences or anything like that?

Not much. We were funnily enough up on the top of the hill. There wasn't enough room. The main battalion lines were down on the perimeter in the rubber and we were back up on the hill and we

13:00 only had a couple of sentry positions to man up there. So we weren't geared up on the front line so to speak. That was our first operation and then at the end of that first operation we were to do a co-ordinant search of a village called Hoang Lien Son which was just to the south. It was a complex operation and was made more complex by the fact that

13:30 we were in an inaccessible area. So the orders for the operation were actually brought in by the company's second in command who had attended the main orders group because I couldn't get to it. He had to deliver these orders. And to cut a long story short we had to advance along the edge of the village up to roughly the centre line where there was a

14:00 Vietnamese post. The village soldier was there manning a post overlooking a minefield. We had to come to that minefield and then turn through a wire fence and go around it to link up and seal the cordon. For reasons that have never been clear, what happened was that when the lead element hit that fence they called forward the platoon commander

14:30 and somehow or other he cut into the minefield fence and was killed. In the course of rendering assistance to him the platoon sergeant and another corporal were also killed and several other soldiers were badly wounded. They weren't all - tragically not all the casualties resulted from the mines because

the soldiers in

15:00 this post overlooking the mines thought the enemy must have been there in the minefield so they started firing as well. So there was considerable confusion in that first period. That was a terrible blow and a terrible tragedy for us as a company to start our war. In effect that platoon lost all its leaders in one hit, the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant and

15:30 a lovely fellow called George Gilbert who was the senior corporal in the battalion. And Bernie Smith was a lovely fellow and Brian Walker and it was just like that. The other two corporals were wounded and handed out. So we had to start again after ten days' operations with new leaders in that platoon. Interestingly enough George

16:00 Gilbert's wife, Dot, often marches with us on Anzac Day. I didn't see her this year. Bernie Smith, the platoon sergeant, his son is a graduate of Duntroon and recently commanded 1RAR in Timor. So it is nice that that connection is actually kept on.

What happens when an incident like that of friendly fire happens?

There was a very detailed investigation

16:30 of what happened from the point of view of (a) if there were any weaknesses preventing them from happening again and (b) if there was any negligence then there was obviously a requirement for some disciplinary action to be taken and (c) to look at the sort of processes that would involve. One of the wonderful things was that the

17:00 air force were very good. They were prepared to hover an aircraft at some risk, because they didn't know we were there and firing, with a spotlight at night time while the tedious business went on of probing for the mines and getting the bodies and the wounded. Right at first light this young sapper [engineer] who had been working away all night, you could almost see him step back, wipe his brow and he trod on a mine. The helicopter was going and it turned around and came back and lowered a rope

17:30 and they hauled him up. I don't know how badly he was wounded or whatever happened to him after that. That was one of the disappointments I think to me personally of serving in Vietnam. That sort of thing happened and you had no idea. You never ever saw or heard anything else again because you were off and fighting the war and they were gone.

Is that why blokes have problems, not just in Vietnam but in any war, where their best mate, and they are practically

18:00 **brothers, dies and there is no grieving process?**

There is certainly no time to grieve but whether that contributes to it or not I think that is for others to say who are qualified in that area but I'm sure that doesn't help any.

How do you deal with that as their boss?

Well you can't deal with it in a sense that you can't, as I was describing earlier,

18:30 take the position that, "Oh, dear oh dear, it is all my fault." You would then just result in inertia and you wouldn't do anything. So you have to examine your actions and satisfy yourself and say, "Well I did everything I possibly could in that circumstance to deal with the matter." And having reached that conclusion

19:00 to put your own personal feelings that you knew these people very well and that you respected and admired them, you've just got to put those to one side and get on because you've got responsibilities. In that sense it makes it a bit easier actually for leaders to deal with because they are busy and they are fully occupied doing something whereas a

19:30 soldier has got some time to sit back there while he is on sentry or waiting to be told to do something. He has actually got some time to sit back and think about it and ruminate on it and it can be very unsettling for him.

Is it part of your job then to write to the family about that?

Yes. I would write to the family but again, and I digress and leap ahead here a little bit, as I look back

20:00 now one of the regrets I have is that I didn't make any effort to keep in touch or get in touch when we got back. When I ask myself, "Why not?" there are a few reasons I think. One is of course is your own homecoming and I went back to Western Australia, to Perth, and of course the majority of people's families weren't in Perth. I didn't know, I had all the

20:30 addresses and there was some uncertainty as to whether they would have wanted contact. I wanted to get on with my life. There was a whole multitude of reasons why I didn't but now I wish I had made more effort to seek them out and see if they wanted me to call on them. I'm sure some of them wouldn't have wanted any contact at all but others would have valued it. I have often seen

21:00 many instances of people calling on and seeing their mate's family. But that opportunity wasn't there

and for me in the west it was just a practical issue of being able to afford the air fare and flying around the countryside to go and do that. It was just not there.

That would probably have to be one of the worst duties that your job entailed?

Yes, it was terrible, terrible, obviously to do that.

21:30 You are trying to write that letter while your own personal feelings are at their heightened sense as well. You are hurting yourself and trying to give comfort to the family and that is very difficult to provide comfort to the family.

The chopper [helicopter] that was hovering over the mine area, was that a 9 Squadron chopper?

Yes.

Much has been said about the army and the air force's interactions in Vietnam. What are your comments on that?

By the time I was

22:00 there they were operating very efficiently and I have no complaints about them. Certainly there were problems earlier and later in my career I was surprised at how the air force had lost all the skills that they had had in Vietnam. During their time in Vietnam, I'm talking more about the helicopters, I don't know about the bombers but I've no reason to think they weren't as good as anybody else,

22:30 they were prepared to take risks. One night we had a soldier who was sick. We weren't sure just what the heck was wrong with him and whether he'd been bitten by a spider or a snake. He had a fever and he was in a lot of distress. We were up in a very difficult area. We had a contact late in the afternoon so there were enemy about. The problem required a helicopter to come along and hover, because there was no landing

23:00 site, and lower something down at night, a litter to put this fellow in, and take him out and let him go. They came. There was no sort of, "He's not that sick, he can wait until dawn." They came and that was the measure I thought. You couldn't ask for more than that.

Was the majority of air lift stuff that the regiment did in Vietnam was it with 9 Squadron or was it with Americans?

23:30 No, a lot of it was with Americans. You would get annoying things and this is just the difference between somebody in the air and somebody on the ground. I remember on one occasion we were in this area where we were finishing an operation. And you couldn't see. The grass was above your head, about a couple of metres high. So we were in some sort of formation and we worked out by compass bearing to go to somewhere and hopefully we were all in some patch for this aircraft. The pilot wanted to change it around and move us about.

24:00 I was explaining to him, "It's crazy. We can't see one another. We can't move. You can see us. Land your helicopter there. What's your problem?" There were those sort of issues where they just had no concept of what the problem was. Of course when they landed all the blades flattened all the grass and you're standing up so they're saying, "What are these blokes on about? You can see perfectly well. There's no high grass here."

Many blokes have spoken of the American

24:30 **Iroquois pilots being real cowboys?**

I think it was just the American attitude. Most of them were boozy guys with catchy phrases and catchy call signs. You would have some American come up on your radio and you'd say, "Hello this is Call Sign 4." And he'd say, "This is G 96 and I've got fifty rockets of this and sixty of that. Can I deliver anything in your area?" Something like that would come up and that's

25:00 just not the way we operate. So you would expect to form the impression that they were a bit gung ho [overly brave]. They were very confident in what they did. I certainly didn't have any issues with American helicopters. They were all pretty good and pretty confident.

After that incident with the co-ordinant search how do you get the blokes going again?

It was very difficult. We had a new

25:30 sergeant come in who was very good and some new NCOs. Of course we were back out on operations and that's the best thing to do to keep them busy. That happened in early March and a new platoon commander arrived and he had just settled in when tragically, I think it was on Anzac Day and if it wasn't on Anzac Day it was the day before in April, he was badly wounded and evacuated.

26:00 So that was another set back for that platoon. The next platoon commander came along and he just didn't fit in and had to be replaced. So it wasn't until about June that finally they got a platoon commander and he stayed for the rest of their tour. That platoon certainly had a rough time and I

nurtured

26:30 them quite bit by deliberately not sending it on what I perceived to be the most dangerous route or where the chances of trouble were. I would perhaps use the others but not to such an obvious extent that they were always out of it. That platoon suffered greatly as a result of that loss of leadership. The soldiers were starting have bets on how long their next platoon commander was going to last

27:00 as is their way.

How would days like Anzac Day be observed in Vietnam?

We were on operations and that was it. There would have been ceremonies back in the base I would imagine.

Speaking of working out ways to protect your guys and not throw them headlong into danger,

27:30 **what was the military intelligence like when you were there?**

Again I don't know but I can give you some examples. We would be deployed into an area where it was said there was a large concentration of enemy. We would patrol through it for days and not see anybody. So, whether they were well hidden and we couldn't find them or whether the information was wrong or not I don't know. I recall,

28:00 just moving along, after this operation - after the first operation, the minefield one, we them moved up into the province above us. I can't remember the name of it now, to surround the Bien Hoa area because of the Tet Offensive of the previous year. And this was the period of Tet so a number of battalions were dug in. And we were one of those that were sent up there.

28:30 And we were out patrolling one day and it was very dry. I remember particularly this big creek bed we would go out in front of us and walk up. At night time we would get these reports from their sensors saying that there would be two sampans moving down the creek that we'd just been in. And it hadn't rained, it was dry. There were those sort of things were happening regularly. The Americans had very good I think sensor devices but were not necessarily very good at interpreting what those

29:00 sensors were picking up. After we had been there maybe ten days or so and it was obvious there was not going to be a Tet Offensive the rest of the battalion was re-deployed. My company was left to stay and we just thinned out as you can imagine it over the entire battalion area. I think it must have been the night after they left. I was sleeping on a stretcher inside this command post. We had dug in.

29:30 We had all dug in weapon pits and things ready for the big battle. And a sig [signals] woke me and said, "Sir, Sir." And there was an urgency about his voice. He had me instantly alert and I said, "What's wrong?" And the policy there was before artillery or aircraft delivered fire onto the ground whoever owned that patch of ground, and had the area of operations, and had operational authority over it had to give clearance for the grid

30:00 reference that that particular ordnance was going to deliver it. And he woke me up and he said, "They want to fire and I think it is us." I said, "Ok." I had a look at the message and sure what the sensors had picked up was us. They were about to deliver this great pile of artillery right on top of us and they were wanting clearance from me for them to fire on our position. They were a bit taken aback

30:30 when they discovered it was us too. Again, I can't comment particularly on how good the intelligence was because I wasn't working on the area.

It would be across your desk wouldn't it?

Yes I would have a brief on what the operation was about and what we were looking for and where we were going. It was best guessed. At one stage we spent a lot of time looking for some concrete

31:00 bunkers in an area called the Long Green which was supposedly reported by an SAS patrol. We never saw any concrete bunkers. A couple of years later when I was posted to the SAS I went through all the patrol reports and there is no reference there of any concrete bunkers so where the concrete bunkers came from who knows? But there were other occasions of course. There were lots of occasions where SAS had identified camps and were able to lead us into positions or

31:30 where there were radio intercepts obviously that were passed down that they thought this was happening or that was happening. There was obviously intelligence that enemy was in the area and mostly we had contacts. So you have to say on a global point of view it was probably reasonable.

Most of the time the SAS were just supplying information but how often would they actually go with a patrol and

32:00 **lead them?**

I couldn't put a number on it but there were a fair few occasions when that happened. I guess it happened from time to time.

What other support did you get from APCs [Armoured Personnel Carrier] and things?

Excellent. Tanks and APCs were very valuable and we had good working relationships with them. It was good with artillery.

32:30 The engineers were excellent and we always operated very well in a team. I think everybody had a high degree of competency and they knew what they were doing. I certainly didn't have any complaints about any of them at all from that point of view. I think they were all very, very good. I think after we came back

33:00 from that operation where the Americans were going to fire on us we were redeployed. And the battalion was looking for a headquarters. And the first night we came into this area and we could tell there was a bunker system. You can always tell a bunker system and I'm sure other veterans have told you because you would see trees had been cut down and there were attempts at camouflage and there were usually tracks. And if they were there you could smell something. And there was that

33:30 feeling it was just the tingling of your spine and you knew that it was dangerous territory. The difficulty with a bunker system was that you never knew where you were in it because the layout was not circular at all, it was random. It is easiest to describe as a "Y" but you never knew where you were coming from in the "Y." So if you went in the middle between two stems which was quite often the case you could have people firing on either side of you. Anyway, when we got into this

34:00 system late in the evening it was brand new but it didn't appear to be occupied. It was very big and freshly dug. In the morning we were short of water and I sent a patrol down towards the creek to locate some water. It was a platoon patrol and it moved off. And I stayed with the headquarters and another platoon. And I went to map the bunker system, to draw the diagram so we had some

34:30 notion of how big it was because I needed to report it. And then we'd get some engineers in probably to lay CS gas [tear gas] in it to neutralise it. Anyway, I set off, my orderly and myself, and they were kind of narrow these bunkers. You would have seen the entrances to them. And I used to wear a belt with my water bottles and ammunition pouches and I couldn't get in. I was taking the thing off and getting in and putting it back on. I got fed up with this

35:00 after a while so I just dropped my belt. And I was wandering along and I had my rifle, my Armalite [rifle] under one arm, and a torch and a red pencil and I was drawing this diagram on my hand, my left hand. And I heard a noise. I think it was a noise, it might have been movement, and it attracted my attention. I looked up and maybe five metres away here is a

35:30 guy about to take a shot at me. So I seemed to do lots of things at once. I threw my torch away and the pen and tried to get my rifle back over from my right hand and cock it and fire and at the same time he was firing at me. That all kind of happened very quickly and then there was silence. Then I could hear some Vietnamese voices in the scrub behind me.

36:00 I only carried about fourteen rounds in my magazine for a twenty round magazine because I never expected to fire anything. And because I wasn't using ammunition I didn't want the springs to be unduly weakened. So I thought, "I'd better check and see how much ammunition I've got left." I gingerly pulled it open and I had one round. So I had used up all my rounds and of course all my other stuff was way back there. The batman who had been behind

36:30 me had gone back down the track actually to get my stuff at that time. So he wasn't there. He had just gone. And he came back and he was yelling out but I didn't want to answer him because I was behind this little palm tree and didn't think it was going to give me much protection at all. I convinced myself that I could see this rifle

37:00 and I therefore carefully manoeuvred and thought, "I'll just fire at the rifle with the round and scurry. I can't stay here forever." And about this time an enormous amount of firing was going on in the direction I'd sent this platoon to get the water. So anyway eventually I plucked up the courage to fire this round and of course the weapon was a twig and fell apart. So I moved again

37:30 and there were no shots coming. I thought, "Oh well they've probably withdrawn." My batman had left by then because I hadn't answered him. I thought, "Well, there's not much I can do because I haven't got anything." I picked up my torch, I never did find my pen, and I gingerly wandered in. There was a little bit of blood there

38:00 maybe I had nicked him but maybe I hadn't. I don't know. The group had obviously scurried off. They must have just come in and been equally as surprised as we were. In the interim of course what had happened was that all that firing – the platoon that had been sent off to get the water had run into this big headquarters that we were looking for. They had accidentally come across them. They were in terrible strife. A search party had been sent out for

38:30 me and found my webbing and heard this firing and thought, "The boss has copped it." So they had then reported me – when the CO was wanted to talk to me they had said, "We can't find him." "What do you mean you can't find him?" "Well, he is missing in action." So there was all this great concern going on. Anyway, I eventually found my way back to the headquarters to the relief of all but that was a very big fire fight then that went on. Sadly we lost two soldiers who were killed in that and there were

39:00 quite a few wounded. There was a very good medic by the name of Fitch who was very brave and won

the Military Medal in that contact. The interesting thing about it was we used napalm to draw back a bit because we really had to pull back. We were so close. And they had cut fire lanes so it was causing us all sorts of difficulties.

39:30 The only way out of difficulty was to use this and it was very accurate at quite close range. One of the soldiers that had been killed had lost a leg and that leg was burned in that napalm but we were able to recover that. That was quite a difficult and tough time as well.

Was that the

40:00 **hairiest time - when you think back on your time in Vietnam was that the hairiest occasion?**

For me personally you mean?

Yes.

Yes, it probably was. Yes, I think that would have been. There were a few other occasions when some rounds came past. Certainly my sig who was next to me was wounded on one occasion.

Tape 7

00:30 **Tell us about Bien Hoa?**

The scenario for that was we had just come out of operations. And when you came out of operations each company is rotated through being what was called “ready for action force.” So you were on thirty minutes notice to move if something happened. I was about to interview some reinforcements that morning when I got called down to the

01:00 Task Force Command Post and was briefed on what I understood to be a tank had gone past the village of Bien Hoa and it had been fired on. Later on a convoy had gone past and it had some more fire and there appeared to be some enemy there and they were going to probably deploy us to investigate. So I came back to the company and the company sergeant major said, “What will I do with these six reinforcements?” And I said,

01:30 “We’ll take them with us. It will be good experience for them to give them a run. It doesn’t look particularly dangerous.” And my batman had unpacked all my gear from the operation. And that very morning he’d scrubbed it all as he was wont to do and he had spread it all out in the sun on a piece of concrete to dry it out. He said, “Do you want to take your gear?” I said, “No. I’ll leave it behind. Don’t worry about it.” So I just took my basic stuff and a

02:00 weapon and away we went. Anyway, we were authorised to pull up near the village, a bit south of it. And then we were authorised to get a bit closer. It was still was uncertain as to what was happening in the village except there were enemy in there but who they were and how many was uncertain. The difficulty was there were still civilians that the village chief was trying to evacuate. There were two villages.

02:30 Bien Hoa was a kind of French rubber plantation with the workers’ houses laid out in pretty much a rectangular set up so the houses were all pretty well in rows. Then five hundred metres or so north there was a bigger town called Phu Cuong which was a regional centre. So the Vietnamese officer ran that area. He had an American

03:00 adviser and of course they had some of their own forces, local forces, that he had deployed there. We were waiting for the clearance from the Vietnamese military to say they had cleared the area of civilians and we could go in and assault the village. As we pulled up a bit closer we started to receive a lot of fire from the village. Fortunately it was short. We were out in the open so we had four

03:30 tanks and probably about a dozen or so APCs [armoured personnel carriers]. We were just out on the other side of the road from the village standing there and they were firing at us. We sought permission to either withdraw back or attack. It was one or the other. We couldn’t sit there. So there was further discussion between the task force and the Vietnamese officer and he then said to me, “It’s clear. You go in and do what you have to

04:00 do.” And they were his exact words. I discussed it with the APC commander and the policy or the doctrine is that when you are mounted, the armoured officer is in command and when you are dismounted the infantry officer is in command. I was in command of the overall force but because we were going in mounted it was appropriate that Ray de Vere, who was the captain, had actual tactical command of where the vehicles were

04:30 going and so on and that’s what we adopted. So as we went in we went in with the tanks in front and then the APCs, two platoons up and one back. We moved into the village and nothing much was happening for the first fifteen minutes or so as we started to move in. What was happening was there were still a lot of civilians trying to get out of the village. So I said to the rear platoon

05:00 commander, “You dismount your soldiers and help to get them out and push them north towards Phu

Cuong," which he did. Also if you can imagine these radio sets, I was in this APC with Ray de Vere who was actually forward in the turret commanding the carrying of the troops. So I was talking to the task force because we were there doing the action for them and I was operating 6RAR's area of operation so I was under their

05:30 operation control. So I was talking to them as well. We were talking to the Vietnamese on their net. We had an artillery net and we also had an air net on which we could talk to helicopters and gun ships and fighter pilots. We also had an administrative net and the tanks had their net and the APCs had their net. So there were heaps of radio nets and all sorts of

06:00 different call signs. And it was actually difficult to tell somebody to shut up and get on to the air. If you can picture a rectangle and we were entering it essentially from the east heading to the west. The southern area was open so that wasn't an escape route and the area to the north was where this Phu

06:30 Cuong was where there were Vietnamese forces. The American told us that he had deployed his forces across the west in a blocking force. So we were heading towards him to force the enemy towards that blocking force. That was the theory. As it turned out he wasn't quite right. His forces were deployed on the north-western side of an air field which was several hundred metres away from the edge of the

07:00 village and the western flank was not blocked at all. That is indeed where the enemy escaped but I'll come to that in a minute. Anyway, we started attacking and we got into the centre of it and the tanks started to report heavy fire in the centre of the village. I can recall when we broke into the centre of the village and looking out over the top of the APC and there just seemed to be enemy everywhere. I can

07:30 still see these couple of guys pulling a machine gun on a set of wheels. It was a 12.7 heavy machine gun and they were running with it and taking it out of sight presumably to set it up to fire. The noise was horrendous. People were firing and bullets were in the APC and it looked like something out of the movies. It was just out of control. I could see we couldn't stay in there. And the tanks were all reporting damage from hits with

08:00 rocket fire and so on. So we were delayed in trying to break out while waiting for this rear platoon that I had dismounted. The soldiers had spread themselves out to help the civilians and getting them back took time. There were several near misses with all the tanks and the APCs in this period. Unbeknown to us at the time the two tanks on the right flank, on the northern flank, one of them had taken a very bad

08:30 hit and the crew commander had been knocked unconscious and the radio operator was wounded. So it was only the gunner and the driver that were effective. They were with another tank which was crewed by an officer but not the crew commander. So they had taken off and gone to the corner of the village and the crew commander had taken the casualties out in his tank and taken them away and organised a helicopter. We didn't know any of that. Anyway,

09:00 eventually we were able to break out of the village later in the afternoon. It is hard to say just how long it was but it was a period of very intense fighting. So we came around then, still mounted, and broke out on the southern side and came around on the western side that we were heading for to go back and do another sweep. We came around and this tank was sitting there. "Bloody hell, they've captured a

09:30 tank." And that was scary for a minute until we established that there was nobody in the tank and tried to find out what had happened and we learned about that. I decided that – by that stage of the game they'd sent up new tanks because I think all four tanks had been hit and certainly they had about one round of cannon fire left.

10:00 They were a spent force in that sense and quite a few of them had been wounded. They did a wonderful job. If it hadn't been for them I don't think I'd be sitting here telling this story today and a lot of other people wouldn't be either. While we were breaking out of the village the helicopters were telling us that there were lots of people escaping out to the west. But of course I wouldn't give them permission to open fire because we thought the American fellow was there. We kept talking to him and he said,

10:30 "Yes, yes, I'm there" and "They're not coming." So there was confusion and that was unfortunate in that sense. We probably would have done more but anyway they still live to tell the tale so you look at it from a positive point of view. We did have some air strikes into the western side of the village at the time we were trying to extract the tanks to help us out. One of these Americans, I think he was Jay somebody or other, came in and delivered some rockets in there which took some

11:00 pressure off. But it was a period of very intense fighting. It was absolute chaos and nobody knew what was happening, least of all me who was in charge. You couldn't get a word in the radio and you were constantly with a radio up when you wanted to talk to somebody else. It was chaos. We got out of there and then we started to sweep through. We went out on foot and then there was a big burst of fire that cut a couple of aerials so there was some doubt as to

11:30 whether being on foot was the smart way to go. So we got back on the APCs where we could more effectively manage the battle. At this point we were dismounted and my company was very small. I only had about sixty-five soldiers at that time. And the reason for it was we had just lost a batch of National Servicemen who went back home. They had finished their tour of duty. We had taken some casualties and we were also running an

12:00 NCO promotion course so we had people away on the course, and we had people away instructing. One of my officers was also away on leave getting married. So 10 Platoon was commanded by a sergeant. 11 Platoon was commanded by an officer and then had a corporal next in line. And 5 Platoon was commanded by a corporal and he was the only NCO in the platoon. I think they had about twelve soldiers. So we were

12:30 very thin on the ground when we went in there. The soldiers had really not had any training in this house to house clearing. So we went back into the village and the soldiers worked out a system with the new tank commander who was a Sergeant Browning. He was a very confident and experienced commander. They worked out that what they would do is the tank would fire a round through the wall of the house and then our guys would chuck some grenades in and they'd

13:00 go in. Most of the houses were small rectangular houses maybe five metres by five metres or something like that with a dividing wall between them of maybe two metres high but with a gap to the ceiling. They all had some sort of cellar arrangement and that's where the difficulties were coming in. The enemy were getting down into the cellar and then popping up again. So we started house by house to

13:30 deal with these and there was a very heavy return of fire coming. We got into the centre of the village late in the afternoon and the platoon commander, because his platoon was in the centre, reported that he could see a lot of wires going in through a window. He thought they must have been for Claymore mines. So he crawled up under the window and cut them and then went through the

14:00 window and he rolled under a bed. This is him telling the story. I saw him go in the window but I obviously wasn't there. He could hear Vietnamese voices and the next thing a grenade came over and then somebody looked up with a head over the wall. So he shot that person and the grenade exploded of course and he was quite badly knocked about on the legs as he dived out through the window. He had to be evacuated.

14:30 Also around this time 10 Platoon on the right flank reported losing a soldier. He had been killed. He had been shot between the eyes as they were attacking through. And it was one of these six reinforcements. By then darkness was coming and it was clear to us that we weren't going to complete this clearing of the village and it was too dangerous to be in there of a night. So we disengaged and pushed through and spent the

15:00 night on the eastern side and I used the pack of this soldier who had been killed. I took his pack and I was very grateful for that because it was the wet season and it rained that night and the ground was very muddy. I should add that we couldn't evacuate this soldier straight away either in the middle of the battle. So we got his body and we put it in my APC. So it was there for a couple of

15:30 hours until we could disengage and get a helicopter to get him sent out. That was the first night. It was still very confusing. Obviously there was a large force there and we didn't know quite how many there were. We were being pressed by the headquarters as to who was there and what was there and so on. By this stage of the game reinforcements had been sent through everywhere. Throughout the night we had discussed a plan. And the

16:00 plan for the next day was for B Company of our battalion had moved up and they were going to give me a platoon to strengthen my force. I would continue to sweep through the village and they were going to go up into Phu Cuong in the north because some of the enemy had escaped up through there. They had taken civilian clothes and they were getting away that way. So I walked over at first light the next morning to talk to a fellow called Ray

16:30 Harring, the company commander of B Company, and he was on the south-western edge of the village and at this stage we were on the eastern edge. So I walked around to talk to him. And he was having a shave and he had some tanks with him and so on. We were talking and I could see through the rubber plantation these people coming towards us in what looked like an extended line. I said, "Is your company over there? Have you got some people over there?" "No." he said,

17:00 "That's your company isn't it?" I said, "That's not my company, we're over there." It suddenly dawned on us that that was the enemy. There was much 'toing and froing' [confusion] and shaving mugs going everywhere. And the tanks lined up and moved forward and we engaged the enemy. They captured a 75 recoilless rifle from that counter attack. That then

17:30 led us to believe that there was obviously something still in the area of importance and we were going to have to fight our way through it. So that is what we did on that day using the same technique. It was house by house and the tank round and the grenade in there and you'd go in and clear it out and then on with the next one. It was a very tedious operation. The soldiers did well. As I said I had very few NCOs.

18:00 They worked this out for themselves and just went about it and it was a great thing to see them. When they got to this centre building where the platoon commander had been in the day before and there had been a bit fight it was the headquarters. It was the battalion headquarters. And there were a number of dead down in the cellar. There were obviously officers and there were lots of pistols and radio sets and all of those things were there. That went

18:30 on right through the day and we again stopped that night. And pretty much the next morning we went

in and did what's called a battlefield clearance. We pulled all the bodies together and put things together. There was one humorous incident after all this. You can imagine after three days of fighting and, as I said, it was the wet season. So no one had slept very well and you were covered in this red mud. The engineer

19:00 commander came up to me and we had all this captured ammunition that had all been placed on the veranda of what was the schoolhouse. I didn't know it was the schoolhouse but it there was a thing on it. He said, "What are we going to do with all this captured ammunition?" I said, "John, I don't know, blow it up." I didn't give it any thought. Anyway, about thirty minutes later there was this tremendous explosion and up went the ammunition. There were tiles from the roof of this school house in the air and a

19:30 helicopter that was flying over complaining and all hell broke loose of course. It was a great explosion. It just goes to show you that with moments of an unthinking casual comment what the result can be. There is no doubt about it that the armoured corps, particularly the tanks was really the key to success in that battle. They enabled a relatively small force to take on

20:00 a much bigger enemy force and defeat them. It was certainly very difficult fighting for the soldiers. The thing that came out of it was this individual initiative. I keep harking back to that. That is the thing that distinguishes Australian soldiers. Lots of soldiers are brave and courageous and well trained but Australian soldiers have also got that initiative. Someone will

20:30 step up to the plate and say, "This is what we've got to do." and work out a way and get on with it. They don't need detailed direction on what to do and how to do it. So that in a very brief synopsis was the three day battle of Bien Hoa. So there were some difficult times. Certainly that American telling us that he was in one place but he was in another one was a problem. The radio set

21:00 certainly meant that practically no one could exert command and control for virtually the first few hours. There was a lot of luck.

Did you have your own sig [signaller]?

Yes. We were inside the APC and we had radio assistance on but everybody wanted to chatter on the one frequency and that was the difficulty. And of course as an individual I could only talk to one. Even though there were about eight radio nets and people wanting to talk to me I could only talk to one person at a time. There was this constant

21:30 wait out while you talk to that person and then what I was more interested in was trying to find out what was happening. Everyone else was tuned into our radio net and listening to what was happening and wanting to offer support. So the difficulty I was having was trying to interpret what I was getting and work out what support I needed and then deliver it. In the meantime all these people were wanting to do it for

22:00 me. It got very confusing. They probably succeeded in cluttering it up to a greater extent.

You mentioned earlier on in the piece that moment of panic when you thought that they had a tank and then later on when you see a line of their guys, an extended line, marching towards you and you had tanks, there was no doubt about that?

What were they doing? Exactly. It was a kind of smoky, misty morning.

22:30 I have no idea why they would have wanted to do that attack. I have no idea. I can only think that it had something to do with the fact that their headquarters was still in there and maybe it was still operating. I don't know because we certainly fought again in the centre of that village. The initial time the platoon commander went in he didn't deal with it all. I don't know the answer to that.

Did it say a lot about the enemy, the fact that they would do something like that?

23:00 Well it may say that they were following orders. It may say that they were foolhardy but from what I've read and talking with others they were prepared to sacrifice lives. And they were prepared to attack in a voracious manner.

How did the Aussie soldiers regard the Vietnamese civilians that were caught up in things like that?

23:30 They didn't have a lot to do with civilians across the board because we tended to be out in the field. This was one of those rare occasions. Let me say this, they were generally concerned with women and children and their safety in the same way as our own. I can cite several examples. On one memorable occasion we were up in some mountains and we had

24:00 located below us in a ravine an enemy camp. We were above it. And at the bottom of the ravine there was a track out which they used in either direction. I had put blocks on that track so a force was covering any movement along there. We sat there for two days I think it was and there was no movement. They were probably aware that we were

24:30 there. They were going about their business and they had their women and children. I decided that the best way to deal with it was to put a couple of rockets into the area. They were living in caves. I decided

to put rockets into the area, not actually into the caves, but above the entrances to force some evacuation because we couldn't deliberately attack their women and children. The enemy came out with the

25:00 women and children in the front and they used them as a shield. I didn't give any orders. The soldiers out there knew and just accepted that that was it and they weren't going to shoot women and children. The enemy got away and there were no questions asked about that. On our first operation a young lass was killed. She was armed and part of the party. One of the soldiers

25:30 was absolutely certain that it was him that killed her. She was in the early stage of pregnancy and he had a pregnant sister and he couldn't cope with that. He said, "I can't go out on any more operations." That was okay. We got around that by giving him another task. There were other occasions when soldiers would not

26:00 fire on women and children. So in the general sense they had that sort of respect. However, I equally have to say there were times when they didn't show respect and had to be disciplined in the sense of being spoken to. I think the worst occasion I saw was after that particular

26:30 ambush that I spoke about where the Claymores split apart. I arrived on the scene there was only one person that had been killed and it was a female of indeterminate age but she could have been a teenager and could have been early twenties. She wasn't in good condition. She was scrawny and underfed and so on. And the ground was very hard and very rocky there.

27:00 And they were burying her and they had dug really just a very small grave and were essentially, putting it crudely, trying to fold her body into this little hole which was quite unacceptable. I had to say something there and have that dealt with. That is the – it was under the surface those strong emotions and those frustrations and particularly

27:30 when they had lost a good mate or somebody had been wounded or whatever. And I think that wanting to hit out and inflict some damage and it's natural to take some revenge and some anger released was there and it needed to be kept in check.

You spoke off tape before how on the battlefield there were raw human emotions. Did you ever see any other brutality towards the enemy?

The only

28:00 other time that I saw what I thought was an incident. It was the soldiers getting a little bit inhumane but it was understandable. We had been in a contact and we had had some casualties and then we had killed a couple of enemy. We were moving off. And as we were moving off I could see that the soldiers seemed to be kicking something

28:30 as they were ahead of me. As I got closer I realised that what they were doing was kicking the head of a dead enemy soldier as we went past. This was the group that had lost the couple of casualties and another group was coming up to bury that body. Again, I had to say, "Hey, that's enough of that." That was the only other time. I suppose you can understand in the context of that. It wasn't

29:00 in terms of degrees a horrendous thing that they were doing. Clearly they were doing it out of frustration. We didn't sort of capture many prisoners or do anything like that to put us into that situation where we needed to. The ones we captured at Bien Hoa we sort of handed back pretty quickly and they were sent back for interrogation.

29:30 I never saw any instances of it. We were not involved in interrogation or anything like that of that nature. It has been said from time to time that some prisoners were shot but I have no personal knowledge of that. When I say, "It was said" I am not talking about my own personal company. I'm

30:00 talking about in the course of Australian actions in Vietnam. It has often been rumoured about whether that occurred or not I have no personal knowledge of it.

Do you know of any mercy killings that were done for wounded?

Of our own?

Both.

I know none of our own but I suspect there probably were a couple for the enemy. I know of none personally but then I would be the last to know

30:30 because obviously I wouldn't have sanctioned it or condoned it and would have had to have taken action. So it is a question that I am not best placed to answer.

Was it given that inevitably things would happy that you would either be purposefully or not kept in the dark about?

Look I am sure lots of things would happen in the course of events. I

31:00 know on one occasion some money was captured and was not reported. We were questioned. When I

say, “We,” the officer in charge of the group that captured it and myself, at some length because there had been documents which suggested this was a bag carrier who was carrying a lot of money. And we

31:30 denied all knowledge of this because that is what had been reported to us. Years later I discovered that there was some money there and the soldiers had taken it and sent it to the widow of one of the soldiers who had been killed who had several children. Again, whether that was true I don’t know and again I’ve never wanted to pursue the matter. My personal feeling was, “Good luck” if that happened. “That’s great.”

32:00 **What sort of relationship did you have with your batman?**

Pretty good. He was pretty good. I had a good relationship with all of my team. You had a couple of signallers and your company sergeant majors. My company sergeant major was a very fine man. He had served in 1RAR in the first battalion that went and been awarded a Military Medal.

32:30 He was a very, very fine soldier. He was very highly regarded by the company and by his peers and by the officers. He was definitely the backbone of the company and there was no question about that. There was he and I and a couple of signallers and a medic and my batman. We were sort of the command team. And we changed a bit

33:00 over time but not a lot. I still keep in touch with a lot of those guys.

Did you yourself get R&C [Rest in Country] or R&R [Rest and Recreation] during your year in Vietnam?

I came home and I went back to visit my family in Perth around about the end of September. I deliberately left it to about two thirds of the way through.

What was your thinking behind that?

Just that there’d be less time left

33:30 after I’d got home. And I went back and of course it was a long way to go. I think I only had four days at home. It was wonderful to see the family but it is hard to get straight back into it. I don’t recall having any adjustment difficulties leaving the battlefield and going home. I do recall though having got on an aeroplane at Perth and flown to

34:00 Sydney and got on another plane and come to Vietnam and up to Nui Dat and almost a helicopter waiting for me immediately out in the field. It was almost forty-eight hours of flying somewhere and I was back in the field with a pack on my back and a weapon and I thought, “What’s all this about?” That took a day or two just to adjust to get back into it.

Was it hard just the thought, the mental leap back into Vietnam after having spent a bit of time with your family?

Yes. That is what I was saying.

34:30 It was difficult to refocus back onto it again. However, you don’t have, if you are in command you don’t have a lot of time to focus. There are things you have got to deal with so you’ve got to deal with it.

So you never got any chance to go into Vung Tau or Saigon?

Yes. We went down there. We used to go down there overnight between operations. So about once every six weeks

35:00 we went down there. They had a rest centre and the soldiers would get into town and just generally relax and have a good time. I think that was a good facility. I remember trying to learn how to water ski down there. That is my most vivid memory of Vung Tau. It was without much success too I might add. It was a good break away.

Did you find yourself counting down your

35:30 **days in Vietnam?**

No. Of course all the soldiers had whatever it was and ‘a wakie’ [last wake up before leaving Vietnam]. It was all about to the end of an operation or the end of whatever it was coming up and so the countdown went. One of the things was we were never too sure when we were going home. We didn’t know. For some reason we did an extra couple of weeks or something more than our year and it

36:00 wasn’t announced. We didn’t really have a firm date I think until well into the New Year to tell the family. So we were out on operations I think until the middle of February and we left at the end of February. We were there and I can’t remember exactly when we came in. It would have been around the 16th or 19th of February or somewhere around there that I think we finished our last operation.

Was it normal for the advance party to actually go back then two weeks

36:30 **before the rest of the battalion?**

It doesn't work that way. No, you'd just go back with the main body.

By the same token did there have to be a party remain behind while the next advance party came?

No, not to my knowledge. There might have been one or two but none that I'm aware of it.

So you went back with the battalion?

Yes.

And how did you come home?

On the [HMAS] Sydney.

Comparing say returning to Australia on the Sydney to flying back on R&R how

37:00 **did you find that?**

I think coming back it was good in the sense that there was time to relax and just enjoy the fresh air and have a few beers and not be worried about things. We'd handed in our weapons and we were going home to meet our families and it was a good time to adjust, to make the adjustments.

Despite being keen as mustard to get to Vietnam when you were

37:30 **actually going home on the Sydney was there a sense of relief?**

Yes I think so. I think that is a fair description. There was a sense of achievement and a sense of relief in a sense that you were going home in one piece. I think there were some feelings of sorrow over the people that weren't coming home and those that had been maimed. There is no question or doubt about that. I think everyone was

38:00 realistic enough to know – I never thought we were going to win the war and I always said that. I didn't go there thinking we would win. It wasn't one of those win/lose scenarios that we were going on. I think they were generally the emotions. But there was certainly one of relief. I was very tired. With the last operation I just woke up one morning and I really had trouble kind of moving. I couldn't pinpoint anything down and you lose

38:30 weight over a period of time. And you've got all these tick bites and leeches. You've just got festering sores all over you. I was evacuated out and I had four days in hospital. And they gave me every conceivable test looking for something wrong with me and really all I think I needed was four days' sleep in the hospital. I went back out and I was fine. But

39:00 certainly towards the end you were run down. You were tired. You can't keep up that pressure of the strain of the tension of the battle field together with eating combat rations and lack of sleep and generally unhygienic conditions. You came back out of the field and if you were being picked up in a truck you wouldn't dream of going and sitting in the front with the poor old driver. You were really on the nose. You'd hop in the back with

39:30 everybody else.

In Timor did they do six month tours?

I think they did in Timor, yes.

Could you ever have seen that being used successfully in Vietnam?

No I don't think so but again it was different. And of course the other thing that is different now is the ability to communicate through satellite phones and communications with the families and the expectation of the families to do that. We didn't have that expectation. Indeed a

40:00 couple of times I used to write letters in advance and have a company sergeant major back at base post one every five days particularly in the wet season where you couldn't possibly keep anything dry to write on. I could sort of do that. One of the things we did was to send tapes back and forward. So when we were in between operations you'd make a tape and send it and my wife would send up a tape and

40:30 hear her and hear what they kids would have to say. I enjoyed that and that's how we dealt with it. But, no, I don't think so. I think the twelve month tour was probably right, the right length.

Tape 8

00:30 **Did you have any encounters – some fellows have told us that the enemy would dig up the Australian mines and re-lay them?**

Unfortunately and sadly, yes. Just after Bien Hoa which we finished on the 9th of June, I remember it well. It was on Sunday the 15th of June we deployed into the village of Dat Do. And we were there on a

task to protect the engineers. They were building a series of

01:00 bunkers around the outskirts of the village so the local forces could protect the village. We were taking over from a company and another battalion. We went there by APCs and we de-bussed on the road. I left the company to go into this area right by the side of the road, an assembly area, while I went up to talk to the company commander that we were taking over from. As I drove up the

01:30 road I heard a couple of explosions. And when I got there he said, “Your company has had some mine contact.” So I raced back and sadly the lead man had gone in and trodden on a mine. I think there were two or three killed and about twenty wounded out of that. What had happened was there were a heap of mines in that area

02:00 that everyone was walking around, fortunately it was only the one that had gone off. They were all M18 mines that had come out of the minefield. Of course we were operating in that area where that minefield was being laid. That was a very sad occasion. I think that was a tough period for me because we fought Bien Hoa and then straight after that we had this operation. It was

02:30 in the wet season so this had happened in the middle of the day. We had evacuated all those people back to the hospital. That night I had planned to put an ambush out and I went ahead with that in the pouring rain. They had a contact and killed some enemy. They then withdrew and thought they were counter-attacked and there was some more firing. And we took some more casualties and another soldier was killed, all in the middle of the night.

03:00 Meanwhile there were sheets of water bucketing down and we were trying to deal with it in a shell scrape with a table that was floating in the water with the radio sets on it. That was my experience. Unfortunately I’ve had too many encounters with mines. The minefield – I understand the reason it was put in but I think the assumption that

03:30 the Vietnamese were going to observe it and protect it was flawed. That was where it went wrong.

When you are in a tough patch like that soldiers speak to us about leaning on fellow soldiers for moral support and being able to talk about how they are feeling. As an officer, who do you lean on?

You’ve got no one to lean on. You’ve just got to

04:00 deal with it. I think in my case I had a good strong religious upbringing so I had some faith there that whatever was happening was happening. The other thing was an examination again of what you have done and going over the events and satisfying yourself as to what I could have done to change that. And satisfying yourself that you’ve done the best you can so that you can still

04:30 look the soldiers in the eye. The other thing is to realise that you’ve got to get on with it. I’ll come back to those very early remarks that I made that what soldiers look for is a leader who is confident and competent and the last thing they want to see in their eyes is any doubt and any uncertainty and any confusion at all. They don’t want that. They want to

05:00 see, “Okay these are setbacks and this bloke is unperturbed by that and he’s getting on with it.” Not in an uncaring sense. They don’t want to see that you don’t care. Obviously they don’t mind you being upset by what has happened and they would expect you to be but they also expect you to get on with the job and have their interests at heart. So you have got to work your way through it and that’s the simple answer. I think there were some concerns at that stage.

05:30 There were certainly lots of concerns about the amount of casualties that we were taking, the Australians were taking, in minefields and whether we should or should not be operating in that area of operation. That was an issue and I think there was some issue over the fact that my company had taken a lot of casualties at that time. Nobody said anything to me personally about it but I got a lot of

06:00 visitors just after the event which (a) would have been seen as some support but (b) could equally have been seen that they wanted to come up and check that I was functioning okay. After that particularly bad day when we lost the two on the mines and then at night time we had this contact, the matter was broached of firing into the village

06:30 to cover the withdrawal. I wouldn’t agree to that because innocent civilians were going to be at great risk. To my mind it was certain that the civilians would have been killed and wounded. You couldn’t fire into the village without it.

The visitors that you spoke of, what affect did that have on you?

At the

07:00 time I think I was rather resentful of having to be distracted from my task to receive them and brief them and be with them while they were there. To me that would have been my main reaction. My CO came to visit me and I welcomed that. That was good and we discussed the operations

07:30 and what we were doing. But the other outside visitors were generally a nuisance factor in that sense.

That task of having to be the one that is confident and undeterred and getting on with things, you know, from an outsider looking in it seems like a hell of a responsibility. Did the weight of that ever feel

08:00 **too much?**

I don't think so but I was tired. There was no question that at the end of that tour I was tired and as I was saying earlier I had those few days to recover. No, I don't think it is. That is what you're there for and that is what you're doing and that's what you signed up to do and that's the expectation. It's a matter of being able to 'cut the mustard' [keep up standards] in that sense.

How do you feel you were regarded by your men?

I think that they

08:30 thought I was confident. They tell me now that I was a hard man but they were confident in my ability to fight them and not to put them at undue risk. In that sense I was competent in being a battle leader but I was a hard man and they'll say that. I'm comfortable with that.

09:00 I don't have any difficulties. I think the nice thing about it is that you can meet them on Anzac Day or at a reunion and have a good discussion with them and if there were some issues you wouldn't be able to do that. Remember thought that over three hundred people served in that company so you are only ever going to get at best sixty,

09:30 seventy or maybe eighty at a reunion. A lot of the soldiers sadly and tragically for them suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. And one of the symptoms is that they don't really want any association or anything to re-trigger all those thoughts and provoke their emotional responses to the battlefield. They keep right out of it. They don't go to the reunions and they don't go to the marches. Some people have

10:00 moved on. So when you are talking about what the reaction is I'm talking about a third of the group that are still in touch.

When you are in the thick of things with firing going on everywhere how do you keep your head on the task that is required and what has to happen next and evacuating wounded?

It

10:30 might sound trite for me to say it was easy but because it is your job and there's no one else to do it and people are ringing you up and wanted you to do things, reporting, that requires a response. It's not as though you have a choice. It's how effectively you do it that I think is the issue and obviously if you are tired and there is a repetitive pressure on you that would in some ways degrade your performance. But nevertheless that pressure is

11:00 there, the pressure is always there and you just somehow have to deal with it. It is what you are trained for and it's what you understand your job to be and you're presented with the challenges and what you have got to do is overcome them and that's what it is about. It is certainly sometimes not easy when you are under fire and you have got to organise some ammunition and some of your soldiers have been wounded and you are worried about them. You've got to

11:30 get them out of there and do all of that and having done all of that you've then got to fight the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day. So it is not like a football match when you can have a week off in between. You line up day in and day out. That's just part of a day. You have a contact and then you move on to what is around the corner.

You mentioned that your

12:00 **religious upbringing helped you somewhat. How did your faith serve you?**

It gave me that surety and that confidence to deal with a thing. When you were feeling there were a lot of casualties and a lot of contacts and things weren't happening in a way in which you would like them to happen then I think you rely on that strength of your faith to bring it forward

12:30 and sustain you and to give you the strength and conviction to continue.

Were you yourself wounded at any point?

Yes but only a very minor wound towards the end. We were talking about that carelessness that develops a bit of over familiarity on the battlefield and that's how I was wounded. We had killed an enemy soldier and… towards the end of the tour it was.

13:00 A platoon commander and I and another soldier walked up to have a look at the body and the platoon commander used his foot to roll the body over and he'd pulled a grenade out and pulled the pin and it was under his body. So we heard the pop and it was sufficient time to dive away from it but for me I just got a few minor scratches and some loud ringing noises in my ear for a while.

13:30 **Did it take you off duty at all?**

No. I stayed on duty. The interesting thing was that when my wife was told about that there was a much greater impact back here than on me. I had instructed that my family were not to be informed but that somehow or other slipped through the net. The family had this notion that if two people

14:00 came it probably meant there was a chaplain and a soldier so you were dead. If one came it was just a soldier to let you know they were wounded. That was the kind of folklore. I had arranged in the event that anything happened to me that my brother-in-law would be informed first because he lives up the road and he would accompany whoever the people were down to my family. What actually happened was two men arrived

14:30 without going to my brother-in-law and knocked on the door. My wife of course answered the door in great trepidation. They could only tell her that I had been wounded and that was about all. She didn't know how badly or when or anything. So that was really a poor effort I thought on the part of the system. And it wasn't until the next day that she received a

15:00 telegram that laid out the situation. I had minor shrapnel wounds and had remained on duty and if there was any further advice she would get it. What had happened though was I think she was informed in the afternoon or somewhere around there. I can't remember exactly. But anyway, in the morning she took the children to school and then had arranged to meet one of her friends and go shopping for the morning. And

15:30 she arrived home about lunch time to find my father on the doorstep. He was absolutely beside himself because it had been written up in the paper that I'd been wounded in action. Of course he was incensed that my wife had not had the courtesy to ring and let him know and reassure the family. Of course she knew nothing about this being in the paper. She hadn't read the paper. So it caused mayhem back home for what was really a very

16:00 minor affair in my life. I had given up smoking in Vietnam. I had got sick of it. The cigarettes were wet and I didn't have enough room and so I stopped smoking. I wrote home and proudly announced this. When I was wounded somebody gave me a cigarette and it started me off again. It was the only thing that was the most

16:30 serious result of me being wounded.

A number of the soldiers that we speak to talk of the culture of smoking and drinking in Vietnam. Is that the same for officers?

Yes it was and there is no question that we used alcohol as a tension release mechanism. Certainly the first night out of operations it was customary to tie one on

17:00 unless you were on "ready for action" of course. It would be heavy and serious drinking. I think people out of operations tended to have quite a number of cans of beer each night if they weren't on duty. There was no question of drinking when you were on operations of course. It was used as a

17:30 tension release mechanism.

Those nights that you talk about coming back from an operation and tying one on would you only drink with the other officers or would you also drink with the men?

I would drink with the other officers and the sergeants. We had a combined mess there. We would certainly have a bit of a party and tie one on so to speak. And the soldiers would do

18:00 likewise and they can certainly consume more than the issued amount and would take it down there. We knew that was happening and nobody was going to take undue steps about it. There were duty personnel that kept an eye on things and what happened down there was what happened down there and stayed down there.

The formalities or distinction that exists between officers and soldiers is that different in

18:30 **active service?**

It always varied on individuals. Certainly I think the National Service experience brought even a greater relaxing of the place, yes. I had always been taught that you couldn't possibly know every private soldier's name or

19:00 nickname. If you called some of them Fred Bloggs, your driver and your signaller by their Christian names but you called the others private then you would be automatically making some sort of distinction that could lead to resentment. So my approach has been pretty much throughout my career to more formally talk to other ranks by their name and surname.

19:30 In Vietnam I think where you have got people right up close in your own group I think I probably referred to Jonesy or whatever it was in that more relaxed sort of a way. I would think that I would probably be in a minority. I think the use of Christian name down to soldiers was more common. Mostly back to you people would refer to you as 'Skip' or 'Boss' and not by your first

20:00 name. That was not an accepted custom. Once you are out of the system of course. Once people are out of the system like now they refer to me by my Christian name as you would expect them to.

While you were in Vietnam did you encounter any use of defoliants like Agent Orange [herbicide used in Vietnam]?

Yes, and I'm glad you raised that point. It was an occasion where we had just deployed. The clearest thing in my mind to this day is that we were in an area that had been

20:30 defoliated. I can see now these three aircraft going ahead. There was one in the front and two on either side and they went over us and they had these big booms and they were spraying. What they were spraying I don't know. I would be surprised if it was a defoliant as we were already in an area that had been defoliated but perhaps they were in the wrong area. It came down and it was sticky. And we had to

21:00 actually send for some water to wash it all off because we didn't know what it was and we were worried about it. It quickly went around that it was something like Agent Orange. I'm not sure that Agent Orange was known at that time. It was probably used as a defoliant. I don't recall a specific Agent Orange being mentioned. Anyway the rumour went around that some exposure to this could leave us all sterile and

21:30 there was considerable agitation. It was enough for me to get on the radio and ask to speak to a doctor. I talked to him and explained what had happened and we had a couple of conversations. He came back and assured me that that was not the case and I sent the word out around that. So we got cleaned up and we went on with it. Later on in the Agent Orange Enquiry I thought I'd put my hand

22:00 up to give some evidence about this and others were as well because we were sprayed. It turns out that there is no record of any aircraft overflying our position at that time where we were and where we were is recorded. There is no radio conversation about it. And the reason there is no radio conversation about it is of course all this was going done on the administrative air net, the administrative net, and not the command net which was all recorded.

22:30 This was all about sending for some more water because we've got these things that have flown over us and I want to talk to the doctor. And I'm talking to the doctor on the administrative net and not clogging up the fighting net about this. None of that was ever kept, all those records. I don't know. I can't say with any certainty that that spray resulted in any of the people that were present on the day getting cancer or

23:00 any other consequences of Agent Orange but I haven't been in touch with them all. I just don't know what the result was but there is no question in my mind that we were sprayed and I can see those three aircraft as if they were there today and who knows what it was that we were sprayed with.

What feelings do you have about that?

23:30 I don't have strong emotional feelings about it. I think what has been done has been done. I think you have got to transport yourself back to the culture of the day. I don't think people were being irresponsible. The notion of defoliation wasn't a bad idea in that sense of trying to clear some of the scrub but the way it was done in large

24:00 amounts was quite sad. The other thing they did was land clearing and we were involved in that too. That seemed to me to be quite tragic. They had these big D8 bulldozers in line after line and they just cut swathes through the jungle to clear it out and along the side of major routes and so on. That to me seemed to be a rather senseless way of doing it. But

24:30 you know that was something over which I had no control.

Your post nominals, they were awarded for your Vietnam service?

A Military Cross and a Mention in Dispatches, yes.

Can you just explain what that entails and what exactly they are?

A Mention in Dispatch is given for distinguished service. It was really

25:00 given to me on behalf of the company for the results of their efforts as was the Military Cross. There is no one particular incident that comes out. It is awarded to me for leadership but it is something that every member of the company really has ownership of through their ability.

So neither of those are awarded for a particular action or incident?

25:30 No. It refers to the capture of a number of bunkers and conducting operation and strong leadership and those sorts of words. But I always perceived it as recognition that the company I commanded was a very fine and very good company that distinguished itself on the battlefield. And you can't pin a

26:00 medal on every chest. So as it turns out it was my luck to be the boss and I wore it on behalf of the others and that's my perception of it. I didn't do any particular one thing. I didn't storm a machine gun nest and turn the tide of the battle. I think the sad part about it for me looking back now is there are many individual brave events that

26:30 weren't recognised. I think we are a little bit parsimonious in our rationing system and the way we go about it because we hand them out by numbers. There are so many for so many hundred people on the battlefield. And that's a pity.

What do your post nominals mean to you personally?

I wear them with pride and, as I said, on behalf of all those soldiers that fought under my command in battle.

27:00 I wear them on their behalf.

One other question before we move on from Vietnam is were you involved in the use of napalm at all?

Yes. I was talking about that earlier on. We called it in when we had this very heavy contact. We had taken casualties and the enemy had heavy volumes of fire on us. What we had to do was to have

27:30 some circuit breaker to get out. And an aircraft was up there that had some napalm so we called it in. It comes down in big long tubes that you've seen on the films and it spread this big row of flames along that enabled us to get out. If you were just using bombs one of the difficulties is safety distances. You have probably heard veterans talk about this in the

28:00 past. With these close engagements of twenty or twenty five metres or fifty metres you can't fire artillery onto the enemy because the shrapnel will get back on to you. You can't use bombs out of aircraft. All you can use is gun ships which would take ten metre corrections or napalm, or, if they can see it, rockets. But rockets were a bit more difficult to manage because of the trees. Often what would happen

28:30 and, I just shudder to think how many times this would happen, a typical scenario would be a contact maybe fifty metres apart. We would call in artillery fire to block the enemy's withdrawal while we sought to engage them. We could only generally call it in within about two hundred metres of our position. Sometimes if it was a dangerous situation or it was very dense it would be maybe one hundred metres. But let's just take for example they are

29:00 two hundred metres out. So there is an observer up in the air and he says, "I can see that." And then one of these American aircraft are going over, you know, J69 [jet aircraft] and he's got a load of this and that. "I see where the target is, Oompah." So two hundred metres away from where the fight is going on there is this big patch of jungle that is just being blasted by everything that is coming along. How many times that happened I wouldn't know. We would sweep through the enemy position and

29:30 then we'd just sort of get there and we'd come to this tangled mass of vegetation where all the stuff had been delivered. So napalm was something that you could use that you could bring in quite accurately and at quite close range. If you say to me, "Did I hesitate to use it?" The answer is, "No." I saw it as a means of disengaging to save further casualties of my soldiers. I

30:00 mentioned that one of the soldier's leg that had been separated from his body in an earlier action when he'd been killed was burned as were packs and rifles. When the soldiers brought it to me I was asked, "What do I do with this?" And I said, "Well, bury it." I sensed an immediately hostile reaction and it was clear to me that was the

30:30 wrong response. They saw that I had an obligation and a duty and they wanted that sent back. I recognised that and organised a helicopter and had the burned leg sent back.

How close can you bring in a napalm strike?

Within about fifty metres we brought this in.

Does napalm have a smell?

A very strong one, yes.

31:00 It is an oily smell coming up in the flames. If you are close enough you've got that searing heat. You can feel the wave of the heat come up.

Is there anything you've smelled since that reminds you of that smell?

No. Nothing springs to mind. It is probably like car tyres or something like that.

31:30 It would be something like that. When I was a cadet at Duntroon a plane crashed, a Dakota, and we rushed down there – I think it was 1957 – and the pilot had valiantly got this plane over the college area and crashed it into a paddock still within the college grounds. We all rushed down there and we had these sort of beaters and knapsack sprays and it was hopeless. The plane was burning.

32:00 We all stood around and we could the pilot and the co-pilot burning in these flames in the cockpit. I'll never forget the smell of their flesh burning. It was just a putrid smell, a terrible smell. I recall that. I had no qualms about bringing in napalm. Others will say it is

32:30 now a banned weapon and maybe that is good. That's fine. If it is not available it is not available but I

was doing what I had to do to save my soldiers lives which is what I perceive was my duty.

To jump forward again, coming back on the Sydney you came back into?

Perth. I got out as all the people based in Western Australia did and we didn't have any march through the city or anything like that. The battalion got

33:00 back to Sydney as it was going back to Sydney and it was a Sydney-based battalion and they had a big march through the city.

Who was there to meet you?

My wife and family.

How emotional was that reunion?

It was wonderful. As you can imagine, you were looking forward to spending time with your family and just to catch up with them and see them. I think

33:30 my kids were only small and had pretty much forgotten who I was and I had to kind of renew the friendship with them.

Was that difficult?

No, not for me. I hope it wasn't for them but I don't know.

Did they have questions about where you'd been?

No, they have generally not been inquisitive about my service career but I've never encouraged them to be either.

34:00 I tended to be like, "What's gone on at work has gone on at work and let's not go there." So I've never encouraged them and I deliberately tried not to encourage my boys to join the military unless they had a particular desire but they showed no great interest in it.

So coming back, what happened next? Did you get some leave?

From Vietnam?

Yes, once you got back to Australia?

Yes, I had some leave, a

34:30 month or two I suppose. And then I went – I was due to be posted to the eastern states but as I mentioned by wife's parents were ill so I asked to stay in Perth, to come back and be posted to Perth for a little while. And that was agreed until the end of that year. So I went to the 2nd Task Force which was an army reserve and brigade. It was the first time they had had a young Vietnam veteran come in as their sort of

35:00 staff officer and they were all pleased about that. I enjoyed the experience of mixing with the reservists. It was a nice sort of easy lifestyle for me. My wife's mother sadly died in the May, a couple of months after I got back, and her father died about six months later. So there was no reason for me to stay in Perth and we expected to move at any time.

35:30 In the event I had another couple of years there. I stayed at the Task Force for another year and then went across to the SAS to serve with them for about 18 months before I went to England.

In that period coming back from Vietnam did you have any particular challenges or difficulties settling into life back in Australia?

No. The only time I can recall any frustration was when my car broke down and I wasn't able to get on the

36:00 radio set and ask for a replacement as I would have done in Vietnam. I had an incident at work I suppose and I can tell you the price of stamps in those days was seven cents. Not long after I'd been there, there had been an audit on our stamp account and I was called to the headquarters in Swan Barracks in Perth and paraded to a senior officer and questioned about this

36:30 deficiency in the stamp account. I can't even remember the amount. It was probably twenty dollars or something which I knew nothing about anyway because I hadn't been there. I can recall sort of losing it a bit with this senior officer and saying, "Look, how dare you take this on. I have just come back from Vietnam where I could fire twenty thousand dollars worth of rounds at will if I wanted to and you're worried about this!" I think I threw a ten dollar note which

37:00 wasn't a lot of money in those days and I laid it on his desk and said, "Stick your stamps!" and walked out. Of course an hour or so later I probably thought, "Gee, that's my career gone." But the fellow I had talked to obviously had enough nous to know that I was still adjusting to the life and maybe he had been a bit over the top in his approach and nothing more was said so that was it.

At any point getting back did you consider

37:30 **leaving the army?**

Yes, I did. I think having a long time in Perth and the family were settled in Perth and when it came up that they were going to move they didn't want me to move. I was offered a job and I thought very seriously about taking it. It was touch and go. I looked at it from the perspective of, "I've had a good career and I've been on

38:00 active service and done all those things. What else is there? And my family have been following me around a bit and maybe it's time to give them priority and have them settled." But something instinctively at the back was saying to me, "No, you're not ready for this. You're not ready to leave the army." And I didn't.

You stayed in for another good twenty-seven years after that?

38:30 Yes I had a couple of periods, and I think everybody goes through it, where you have days where you review it and then either go or press on.

What would you say would be the highlight of your career post Vietnam?

I say the three highlights of my career were commanding a company in Vietnam and commanding a battalion here and being a land commander. That was my last appointment here and it was for four and a half years.

39:00 They would be the three highlights but within the context that I'd had a very fortunate career and I'd spent a lot of time in units serving with soldiers in command and more so or much higher than the average. I've had a lot of good appointments. I've enjoyed every appointment pretty much except for one.

Can you tell us what that

39:30 **one was?**

Yes it was after I'd come out of Townsville. I'd been commanding the 3rd Brigade which was the Operational Deployment Force and I was posted into this almost indigestible sounding job called the Director General of Co-ordination and Organisation. It dealt with the budget and co-ordinating everything that was happening in the army and manpower

40:00 and all the sort of nitty gritty administrative things that happen inside the army on a day to day basis. I hated it. I hated it but on the other hand it was good training for me.

Tape 9

00:30 **One thing I did want to touch on about Vietnam was the medivac [medical evacuation] system. Obviously that was a huge part of the Vietnam War. How was that co-ordinated and how well did it work?**

It was excellent and we had great confidence in it. If you wanted it one of the first things that you would do - if you had a contact and as soon as you had a report of an injury you would say, "Stand by dust off [medical evacuation by helicopter]." People would immediately come back wanting details.

01:00 The helicopter pilots knew where all the LZs [Landing Zone] and things were over a period of time. They had built up quite a database. So it was pretty usual to be able to get the dust off pretty quickly. The only thing stopping it normally was if you were still engaged with the enemy in the battlefield. That gave everybody a high degree of assurance. I recall when we were operating that

01:30 day, after that second minefield incident, the only time I had the opportunity to fly down and visit a wounded soldier I was able to do so the day after he was wounded. He was quite badly shot in the chest. I went down to see him the next day and it was amazing. He was sitting up in a chair like this and he had some of his organs down in a plastic bag. Obviously he was not a well man but when I put him on the helicopter I thought, "Gee, I don't like his chances."

02:00 Not only was he sitting up in the chair he made a good recovery. It was a good system and the hospital was excellent as well.

You mentioned that unfortunate part of your job where you couldn't follow up with the blokes who had been wounded. Did you get back to Australia and see blokes?

Well, I saw people for the first time I'd see some on Anzac Day generally speaking. And gradually people

02:30 came through. We had a couple of reunions. The 1987 Welcome Home Parade brought a lot of people

out and that was probably the time when we saw most people. Our battalion has a reunion every five years and our next one is next year. The battalion birthday was on the 1st of March in 1965 so we've always had at the zero or the five

03:00 mark usually around the first weekend of March.

So we'll just touch on the postings that you've had - after the Second Task Force Reserve Unit?

I went to the SAS for a period of time. What I was doing there was marking time waiting to go to the Staff College in England. The SAS desperately needed a staff officer to handle quite a lot of paperwork in regard to getting new equipment and new capabilities and organise exercises. And there was a

03:30 big Special Forces exercise that was held in the Kimberley Region in 1973. I spent a lot of time in 1972 doing reconnaissance for that and writing it up and making all the preparations for that. That was an enjoyable period of time.

Did you find looking after the SAS different to looking after regimental blokes?

No. They were good soldiers. They were getting on and

04:00 doing things after the war. They had a lot more initiative and they operated differently but they were the same sort of people.

And from there it was Camberley was it?

I went to Camberley. I went to England. It was a fifteen month course there. It was a three month course at the Royal Military College of Science in Shrivenham and then twelve months at the Royal Staff College at Camberley. That was interesting. The great value of that was

04:30 there were one hundred and eighty students and I think thirty-five or thirty-eight countries. There were all sorts of people there. A lot of African countries and a lot of Middle Eastern countries were represented. And they were people I had had nothing to do with and it was interesting to mix with them. They had some very, very high quality lecturers that came along and some very good exercises. It was a broadening experience for me and I certainly

05:00 enjoyed it immensely.

Did it surprise you the breadth of countries that were embraced?

Yes. I hadn't expected there to be so many from around the world but there were and it was good.

Did you take the family over?

Yes, we did.

They must have loved that posting?

Yes, they did and we did all the things that people do. We toured Europe and looked around and enjoyed it.

What did you do from there?

I came back to

05:30 Singleton to the Infantry Centre and I was promoted to lieutenant colonel and became the chief instructor. That was a good two years of instructional posting at infantry which was my game. So that was just a nice time and the family enjoyed Singleton. It was a nice place and a nice country town. It was very pro the services and we made a lot of good friends, life-long friends, there. We thoroughly enjoyed that. The

06:00 wineries were just getting on the way in those days so that was also good too. That was a good happy time. From there I was posted down to Holsworthy to command the 5/7th Battalion. That is the highlight of every infantryman's career to command a battalion of course. We were there to do the mechanised infantry trial. What that meant was rather than the armoured corps operate the

06:30 APCs and the infantry just get in the back and ride them we were actually going to operate them and ride in them as well. So we owned them. There were a lot of difficulties about it in the sense that there weren't a lot of resources and it was on again and off again. We eventually got the okay to go and there was great excitement to get a brand new carrier. They were drawn out of the stores.

07:00 Interestingly enough, when we finally got this big exercise under way, and it was down at Puckapunyal and it was a brilliant exercise and it went well, I think we drew something like (and the figures might be wrong here), sixteen brand new APCs and maybe the same number that had been reconditioned. There was a quantity of about thirty or thirty plus and we'd already had about twenty.

07:30 It was really interesting to see how all these things came together. I'm sorry I just lost my train of thought. Twenty-four hours after we got there suddenly all the APCs started to stop. It turned out that there was this break in the fuel lines and in the fuel tank which happens if they have been in store for a long period of time. So they just came to this

08:00 grinding halt. Our technicians just did a wonderful job and worked right through the night to get it back on the road. We were going again within twenty-four hours. That was a brilliant exercise and it proved that mechanised infantry was a very viable capability and that we should continue to develop it.

In a nutshell what is the

08:30 **difference between mechanised infantry using their own APCs as opposed to using the armoured corps blokes?**

If you own the vehicle you can better understand its capabilities. You understand how the radios work and you understand where it can go and what its fire power is and what you can do with it. So you can use it better essentially. It gives you that mobility whereas before you'd get in and you were really going from Point A to Point B.

Did that mean that the armoured were losing the APC?

No because they still

09:00 had a different set of vehicles that enable them to do reconnaissance and carry out what they call cavalry operations which are sort of long-range reconnaissance and mobility in terms of surveillance and all those sort of things. They've still got a definite role.

So there weren't any problems with those guys? Were they concerned?

Yes they were concerned. They were particularly concerned about standards. What they were saying was that they had made a

09:30 career – you became a driver or an operator or a crew commander and this was a period of time. We didn't have that time so we just had to get on and our courses were cut short. And we didn't need to know. It was a bit more that we weren't going to spend a career driving army vehicles we just wanted to learn how to operate this one vehicle whereas they had to train in tanks and all sorts of things. There were concerns the standards would be dropped. And there were

10:00 concerns as to who had the right to say we needed to do this and we didn't need to do that. There were difficulties but good will and common sense prevailed and it worked. When we finished all this the sad part about it was that they said, "That's very good and thank you very much but we can't afford this capability for a while." They left only one company for a period of a few years just to peter along. Fortunately

10:30 that did continue and it is now back fully fledged again. The interesting thing about that period of time is that we were serving when the Hilton bombing occurred. I can remember I was up in the APC compound and we didn't have a telephone up there. It was in an area away from the lines and they were doing an inspection. A

11:00 runner was sent up to tell me the brigade commander wanted to see me quickly. I said, "I'm in the middle of doing an inspection of all the vehicles. Tell him I'll be there as soon as I can." The runner came back and stood attention in front of me and said, "I have a personal message, sir, from the brigade commander." He looked a bit uncomfortable. And I said, "What is it?" He said, "It's to get your f'ing ass down here now." And he had a big grin on his face. I said, "OK." We came down and I

11:30 noticed there were some helicopters all lined up and we were getting a briefing that they wanted us to do reconnaissance of the routes between Sydney and Bowral and particularly this Berida Manor. And then make some recommendations as to what routes might be used – the road or the rail or whatever. The funny part about all this is I was getting in the helicopter and we were going down and I said to the pilot, "Do you know where Berida Manor is?" He said, "No, I've got no idea." I said, "Well if it is a manor it can't be too hard to find. It must be pretty big and it'll stand out."

12:00 We get down there and there are these huge big places everywhere. We had to land about four times. We scared the daylights out of these blokes on the golf course asking for directions. We eventually found it. The other thing about that particular event was of course it hadn't been done before. We were sent out to secure the route and we left the camp at 0330 in the morning. So we were

12:30 rolling down the Hume Highway and going through those areas there like Bargo and Picton at about 0430 in the morning. You can imagine a column of about a hundred armoured vehicles, APCs, going down there. Unfortunately just the width of the track meant that one of our tracks, whichever way we went, went over the cat's eyes over in the centre of the road or on the edge of the road. So this 'clackety-clackety-clack' was adding to it. The lights were coming on and curtains were being pulled and people would have

13:00 thought, "Gee, what's happening here?" I must say it left me with an uncomfortable feeling. "What is happening here in our country? What are these armoured vehicles in the middle of the night doing running down the road?" The rules of engagement were not that clear and they were only issued quite late, just before we were going. We had live ammunition and the instructions were that

13:30 five rounds a man would be issued to each soldier under officer supervision and then they'd be

withdrawn. I was unhappy that there'd been no enemy identified. I didn't think it was possible, because we'd sort of set off, to really impress upon the soldiers under what circumstances they could open fire. So I instructed the battalion that if there was any suspicious activity then they were to run the APC at it in that it

14:00 on the basis that it was an armoured vehicle and it was much better to investigate a road accident than a shooting. All those issues like, "Where did we stand if we shot somebody that turned to be out an innocent civilian?" As we understood the situation there was a fair chance that we would be in a court of law being tried for murder or at best manslaughter. That was some concern to us. It was

14:30 unchartered ground and being done in haste. And while we carried it out I think with a great deal of skill I think all the commanders had that unease about it and were seeking resolution. And I "did a Nelson" in a sense that I didn't issue the ammunition. Later in the day the Chief of the Defence Force paid us a visit. And he was a rather garrulous man and known for eye to detail and

15:00 his first thing was he got out of his helicopter and said, "How many men have you got, Colonel?" I hadn't got the faintest idea how many I was deployed with. So I plucked a few out of my mind which he seemed happy with. Then he went up to ask a particular NCO who was in the Pioneer Platoon some questions. And this NCO was a very good rugby player but he wasn't very good on his feet. He was much better with a shovel in his hand than a book.

15:30 So by sign language we were standing behind him and signalling. He said, "How many rounds have you got?" And we put up our hand showing five. And I won't mention his name but he said, "Five." And it was a relief. There was a period of time there that I thought my career might come to an abrupt halt but we got by. That was an interesting period to go through that. Nothing happened of course.

Where to from Holsworthy?

From Holsworthy I went then down to

16:00 Canberra to a posting to the personnel area and I was involved in officer postings and promotion boards and that sort of stuff. I was there for about –

Was that at Duntroon?

No, in the army office in Canberra. I worked in the personnel branch. O then went off and did six months at the Joint Services Staff College. It was a joint service staff college there so you had students there and staff

16:30 from all three services looking at the higher levels of operating in the bureaucracy and operating in the joint environment. I was then promoted and went out to Duntroon to be the deputy commandant at Duntroon which I was very pleased about and I enjoyed that posting for a year. Then, at short notice, I was promoted and sent up to

17:00 Townsville to command the Operational Deployment Force in Townsville. That was a very busy but exciting time. We were on short notice to move. We have the priority for training resources so we trained hard. I would like to think the brigade was in good shape as a result of my endeavours. I was happy to hand it over confidently that it was in

17:30 good shape.

Was there at any time after Vietnam that you knew of any of the battalions being on stand-by to go anywhere else at short notice?

No. Nothing arose much as we might have liked it to there was certainly nothing to my knowledge. There were contingency plans of course but nothing came out of it. We weren't asked to do anything

18:00 in the operational deployment force in that area. We were still concerned with the defence of Australia and working those things out. In 1983 we did the big Kangaroo Exercise over in the Pilbara region and that was quite a significant exercise in taking all of the road convoys and things and air and getting right across. It was sort of based in Roebourne.

18:30 That was quite interesting to operate in that country and in that area. And [General] Peter Cosgrove was one of the battalion commanders. He was the enemy battalion commander on that and he did very, very well on that exercise. With his usual charismatic way, being the enemy, the local people should have been reporting his soldiers and dobbing them into us, the friendly forces, but Cosgrove had won them over to

19:00 the point where they were on his side and were making it more difficult for us find them and were making it even more difficult to find them. They were even giving us false information. If you can imagine these civilians supposedly helping their defence force, or supposed to be helping their defence force, that had been won over by Cosgrove's charisma and were leading us astray to the point where the exercise controller had to step in and get some concessions so the exercise could run smoothly.

19:30 That was what was happening there. And then I went down to this other job that I talked about in the chief's office and working there. That was not a lot of fun and it was an education. I learned a lot. There

as no doubt about that but you couldn't say it was exciting. A lot of good people worked there. There were a lot of capable staff officers.

20:00 I didn't like staff work much. I much preferred to be out with people in a regiment. Then after two years I was promoted and sent out to Duntroon to be the commandant and I had three very pleasant years out there.

Was that more rewarding on that second posting to Duntroon than the first?

Yes, it was and for two reasons. One was that

20:30 I was the commandant and not the deputy commandant and secondly it is always an opportunity to put into the system what you've learned and experienced. And you're training the next generation of leaders so that was good. We had the added interest that at that stage female cadets were coming through the system. They had had a year at Portsea

21:00 until that had closed and then had come up to Duntroon to come through. So we were still developing their training programme and dealing with that. There were some very fine people that went through there. Unfortunately the physical demands of the course were that they really did get a lot of injuries and couldn't complete the course. We were constantly seeking to find ways that made it physically less demanding without

21:30 comprising their position with their male cadets. They were fiercely competitive about that. They didn't want to have concessions. We were also mindful of all the government rules and regulations about equal opportunities and discrimination and so on.

Was it even possible to balance those concerns?

It was very difficult. There were some issues that stood out. For example

22:00 on an obstacle course the advice we received was that a female pelvic structure was such that jumping from a height above a metre it is more likely to do some damage than a male. A male can comfortably jump of this two metre high beam and not do too much damage as women would in jumping off. So we had to lower the height. There was no particular difference. You've still got to walk up it walk along it and

22:30 jump off it but it's just not as high. So there were some things like that that were achieved that were practical.

Then I guess the guys were saying, "Well, if we've got to do it this way how come they don't?"

No, the guys were comfortable about it. I think there were adjustments that had to be made. There were a lot of NCOs particularly that had spent their entire life in units and regiments, an all male environment,

23:00 and suddenly confronted with these women that they had no experience of. The most natural thing in the world is to treat them as you would your mother or your sister or some attractive young female. It took some time to develop a professional approach to them. It was a learning experience all around for the male

23:30 cadets, the staff and for the female cadets. But certainly the quality of the female staff going through aided the process immeasurably. They were very fine and to my knowledge still are a very capable group of people.

What are your thoughts on women in combat roles in the army?

Well, I don't favour it. I think they can do lots of things very well. It is not to do with courage.

24:00 For me the difficulty that I have is that if I am an infantryman and I am wounded in battle then my expectation is that the soldier next to me would be able to pick me up and put me over his or her shoulder and take me out of the line of fire so that I can get medical treatment. I am going to be wearing webbing with ammunition and water bottles so the weight factor is going to be at least

24:30 a hundred. Say the average male weighs seventy there would be at least another fifteen or twenty kilograms of weight at the minimum so at least say ninety to one hundred kilograms in weight. And that is no mean feat for any woman to undertake.

I know often when this topic is discussed they talk of the possibility of all women sections or

25:00 **platoons or companies or whatever – do you see that as being more reasonable?**

No, I don't. I think if you are going to have that you have got to have the mix right because there are some physical difficulties about the speed with which you can dig a weapon pit. For example if you are going to dig in and you have to do it in a set time because the enemy are going to arrive and fire artillery, men can dig faster than women. They are just physically stronger. So if you had an all woman section they probably wouldn't get

25:30 down deep enough by the time the fire arrived. No, that didn't work as well. If you are going to integrate you must integrate and at the ground they have to work out how they are going to deal with all those issues. But I don't see any role for women in infantry battalions. It is hard, physical work. It is unhygienic work in the

26:00 sense that you very rarely get an opportunity to have a decent wash. And it is just a brutal place that kind of battlefield. It is a tough uncompromising circumstance.

Besides the infantry can you see them possibly being utilised in other combat corps?

Well, there's no reason why in terms of firing artillery and I'm talking about indirect

26:30 fire weapons there's no reason why they can't do that. They fly aeroplanes quite competently as far as I'm aware. I know of no reason why not. I'm not sure about engineers. I think the same physical problems come about with the engineers and that's an even a more physical hard work thing. There's no question that a female can be a capable engineer

27:00 and know all the theory and supervise it all but whether she would be comfortable just supervising and not wanting to chip in to the same extent as the others I don't know. I think that could be an issue for them.

Was it difficult in divorcing your own personal opinions and tackling what was obviously an objective that the army and government had obviously decided to integrate women and get women into the services?

27:30 No. That was the policy and there was just nothing to be gained by fighting it. You had to get on and just make it work. That was my job and I was keen to get that done.

Obviously being back at Duntroon must have been fantastic in that you'd come the full circle?

Yes, I'd come the full circle and it was very rewarding. They were very fine men and women. People talked about the standard dropping off. I didn't see that.

28:00 To me the same fabric of the spirit and the teamwork and sense of tradition was all still there. Sure they did things differently and it had been modernised but that was a good thing as I saw it. They were very fine men and women and the country had every reason to be proud of them.

I guess when you look back in a sense it was great to be there when something new was happening?

Yes, it was and I enjoyed it.

28:30 **Did you have a plan for your career then or before then?**

No, I didn't. I had no great aspirations. In fact when I was a very young fellow I took out an insurance policy that would mature at forty-seven because that was the retiring for majors. After a period of time I suppose I had always aspired to command an infantry battalion.

29:00 After that I was less certain. I didn't have great expectations. I didn't enjoy staff work in Canberra and it seemed to me you had to do that and succeed in that area to "get on." So I didn't necessarily have high expectations of what happened. I was always one for lucky breaks. I had a few lucky

29:30 breaks along the way essentially.

Like a great sportsman were you thinking this will be a good time to call it quits?

I knew it was time to go. I had been a land commander for four and a half years and that is the longest I think that anybody had had that appointment. It was a very busy period. The day over I took over the job – the very first day in the job I had to go to Canberra to prevent a

30:00 contingency plan to evacuate some Australians from another country.

We'll go from Duntroon to going to that position. How were you told about it?

That I was going to be a land commander? Well, that was a little bit untidy. I don't really want to go into too much detail. You don't just make one move. It has to be a shuffling of generals. And the Chief of the

30:30 Army was due to retire and he was the trigger to who was going where and who was going to replace him. So there was some delay in that plan which caused delays and there was a bit of a gap between the time I finished at Duntroon to when I started as a land commander because of the uncertainty over that appointment. I was hoping to become a land commander but nothing was

31:00 firm until quite shortly before I became a land commander in effect.

You must have been over the moon?

I was very happy to do that. It was a great appointment. You were based in Victoria Barracks in Sydney and you commanded all the operational elements of the army for both the regular force and the reserve

force. So it was a force of combined strength of about thirty-five thousand and

31:30 spread all around the country.

I guess in your wildest dreams as a cadet at Duntroon did you ever think you'd be –

Never, never. It never occurred to me. I had never had anything to do much with generals other than the commandant who always seemed to be a remote figure. Interestingly enough, when I was a cadet I thought he was a rather old man and I was somewhat horrified to discover that

32:00 when I became a commandant he and I were both the same age. We were both forty-seven. I suppose the cadets viewed me as a rather old man too.

So what were there highlights of your time there?

Definitely the highlight was the deployment and the contingency planning for a number of

32:30 operations. I suppose what actually happened and it was just being at the right place at the right time, the headquarters had largely been in a resource allocation headquarters and was certainly developing and contributing to policies but not having any strong operational role. As I said, the day I took over I had to fly to Canberra to present a plan. I must confess it was a pretty

33:00 hairy old plan to evacuate some Australians if the need should arise. As it turned out it didn't. Then from there after there were a series of things that came along. We then became responsible for the planning of the deployment to Cambodia and Somalia. The role of the headquarters in that was to exercise national command. So we were

33:30 responsible for putting a force together and taking orders that we got from Canberra and putting it into a formal order of structure and the head of the force reported back to me in Sydney and then I reported back to the Chief in Canberra. We did a lot of contingency planning for other circumstances that came about as well. A lot of the United Nations missions came under our

34:00 command. There were people in the Western Sahara and in the Middle East and in the Sinai and all those forces all came under the command of land command. So there were quite a number. I have seen the figures on them but I've just forgotten what they were, the amount that we mounted, but there were quite a significant number in that period of four years. In the process of

34:30 course we had to develop operational systems to support these and have a command centre, an operations room, that was twenty-four hours a day and operating seven days a week. So it was going from a what you might say rather slow post peace time arrangement the headquarters became a fully operational headquarters in every sense. And I think the young

35:00 staff officers who worked there enjoyed it. They had a great sense of achievement in being able to put together these things that enabled a force to deploy and sustain them and help them do it. So there was a strong motivation and a strong sense of satisfaction out of working out of that headquarters.

What sort of team did you have there in Victoria Barracks in Sydney? How big was it?

The headquarters was about one hundred and twenty

35:30 five strong. It was a standard headquarters with operational staff and intelligence staff and an administrative staff and a bunch of specialists providing advice. It also had a training section because we were responsible for allocating resources for training as well.

How much sort of liaison did you have to do with the government in that role?

Me, personally, not a lot

36:00 because that was the job of the folks in Canberra. Headquarters in Canberra dealt at called the strategic level and I was concerned with dealing with the operational level which was the planning once the decision had been taken to go and how many. And then it became my task, in conjunction with the other commands of the army, to put it together and deploy it and exercise national command.

36:30 National command is a bit different from full command. Take Somalia for example, the commander over there was under the operational command of an American commander who was part of the Coalition Force. He had right of access back to me on any national matter and to clarify anything or if he needed extra resources or whatever that circumstance required. It was the same in

37:00 Cambodia. General Sanderson was the first commander in Australia but he didn't answer to me. He had a UN [United Nations] boss and if he needed something from Australia he would talk to the Chief of the Defence Force. But the commander of the force there, the signals lieutenant colonel answered to me. His operational boss was General Sanderson but for an any national matter he came back to me. And that's how the system works. It works well. There has never been any difficulty in

37:30 drawing the line as to what is what.

Did your role involve a lot of travel?

There was a lot of travel because you had to visit most of the deployed forces at some stage. There is no question that it is better to visit personally for a couple of reasons. One so that you've got a clear indication of the environment in which they are operating and secondly you can bring the full weight of your office to bear in fixing anything up while you are there

38:00 or when you get back whereas if a staff officer visits he has the benefit of seeing it of course but he just brings back a less authority and a les authority to fix something that is urgent because he's got to convince everybody up the line that this is a really critical issue.

You would visit deployments in Somalia and places like that?

Yes. I went to Somalia and I went to the Western Sahara and most of those places and the Middle East.

38:30 I visited all our deployed forces. I went to Cambodia.

Did any interesting visits come out of those sort of trips?

They were all interesting. The thing that comes out is the initiative again of our soldiers. I remember going in the Western Sahara to visit this particular outpost. It was in Algeria actually.

39:00 It was a place called Tindouf in Algeria. It was where the opposition were, the Polisario, and the UN team was led by a Russian colonel. We had a lance corporal signaller there running our communications. This lance corporal did the roster and tasked the patrol and got the reports in and to all intense and purposes he was running the show. If he hadn't been there they would not have operated. It was a very funny visit because we flew in

39:30 there in one of these Russian Yak Aircraft with some very big Bulgarians I think they were the crew. I always remember the steward of the aircraft had a pair of thongs and shorts on and he didn't look like he'd had a shave or a wash for about three days. And we took off at about eight o'clock in the morning for a forty minute flight and he came along and the only word he said to me was, "Do you want beer?" And he thrust this can of hot

40:00 beer of some sort under my nose which I didn't drink. Anyway, leaping ahead, we went out into the desert and met these Polisarios who were the opposing party and opposing forces. And I think they must have made a decision that for some reason they would put on a dinner that night.

40:30 So they had a cultural show. As you can imagine there was this rather scratchy loud speaker playing some sort of Arabian music in the desert. It was mostly just on sand. And these girls were dancing but were all veiled. Then we were taken off to a meal and it was inside a walled but unroofed old structure.

41:00 And we sat on some carpet and cushions. And out came all this very highly spiced lamb. There wasn't a piece of cutlery in sight. They generally spoke French and their Defence Minister in Waiting spoke quite good English and I sat with him and he interpreted. Anyway, in the course of the evening the leader of the Polisario got up and made this stirring and impassioned speech about thanking Australia for its support and why they

41:30 wanted to have ownership of the Western Sahara and how important it was to receive international support in the achievement of their goals. They wanted to be a democratic, freedom loving country and all those phrases. Then, with some flourish, he pulled out this silver coin and said, "When we achieve independence this will be our currency and I would like to present this to you."

Tape 10

00:30 The head of the Polisario pulled out this coin and said, "When we get independence this will be the basis of our coin and I'm presenting it to you and the people of Australia in recognition of your support." Then an aide came along and he appeared to have some national costume and he handed that over as well. I was in field uniform and I had the signals lieutenant who was the head of the

01:00 contingent with me and a driver and signaller. There was just the three of us and we had nothing. So I leapt to my feet and thanked him most profusely for this and I then gave a little speech to the effect that the people of Australia and the Government of Australia understood their desire for independence and we supported all freedom-loving people in the pursuit of democracy and then I said, "On behalf of the nation, sir, I have the great honour and privilege to present to you" -

01:30 and I had a land command biro stuck in my pocket and I pulled it out and presented him a land command biro well knowing that half the nation wouldn't know anything about the Western Sahara let alone care about it. When we then got back, by this stage it was close to midnight, and we tracked back through the desert back to Tindouf in this

02:00 convoy of land cruisers. Out of the back of the last land cruiser there came this enormous great big roll and we had no idea what it was. And it turned out to be a goats' wool rug that had been woven with their national emblem. The coin and the rug I presume are still somewhere in Land Command in the

barracks there somewhere.

How was the biro received?

I have no idea.

02:30 It was the best I could do on the spur of the moment.

It was Aussie initiative?

Yes.

You've spoken a lot about the Australian initiative and how they got on and accomplished the task at hand. How were they received by the locals in these places?

Very well. It is just in our nature to laugh at kids and give them lollies and talk to people.

03:00 It is the way that we do things. We generally have a positive approach to people and this natural curiosity about, "Why do you do it like that?" And the ability to ask a question in a way even though there are language barriers that conveys some genuine interest. People I think can sort out even through language barriers

03:30 sincerity as opposed to just mere politeness and I think we convey that. We do take a genuine interest. Our soldiers do that and I've seen it in many, many places. Even in the toughest of conditions when they would have every reason just to sit back and take it easy they would do something. They'd get out and help somebody or take some spare rations to an orphanage. Maybe the local cleaners have got some kids and

04:00 they'd give them some spare clothes or get their wives to send something over to help in that way. There are countless examples of that happening. Somalia was a very good operation in that sense. We didn't know what strength the enemy forces would be and what it was going to be like and it was certainly a foreign environment to us. We'd never been into that area

04:30 and we didn't know much about the culture. It was very difficult to communicate with the language barriers and the battalion that went over there just did a wonderful job. They very quickly won the confidence of the people to the point where the people would come to them and tell them there were bad guys around and come to them to offer assistance. So we are just good at that. We are very good peacekeepers. There is no question about it.

05:00 **In those visits to deployments that were overseas what sort of problems would you have to fix while you were there?**

The usual – communicating with home, mail and how long are they going to be there. "When are we being replaced?" They were always constant issues. But mostly the matters

05:30 revolved around the nature of the work they were doing to the extent that they could expand that. They might have been asked to take on additional functions to the extent that they could branch out so to speak or go to places. For example, in the Middle East, there was a proposal for us to go back into Lebanon and deploy back into Beirut. And the

06:00 policy decision had been taken, "No, we won't go back into Beirut." I'm talking about at that time, the early 90s, it was too dangerous. So that was an issue that came up. An issue that came up while I was in the Sinai was how long they should be there. Sinai was a very unfriendly place and in a very remote area and we were looking at a twelve month tour of duty. My assessment was it was just too long for these soldiers

06:30 in a desert environment. They had comfortable barracks but there are only so many nights you can look at a video or watch a movie. They wanted to get out and get on with life. So they were the sort of issues that would come up. Somalia was always a concern. The time I went there I was dealing with a movement control organisation which was a function we'd left there. They were very efficient and

07:00 doing what they had to do but we were concerned about their protection to the point that we were able to organise to get some extra people to go across and provide that close protection, personal protection, for them. They were the sort of issues that came out of being there on the ground and seeing and talking to people. You always made visits to whoever the Coalition

07:30 Commander was and the Coalition staff and had briefings and heard what they had to say. And you would perhaps be bringing back messages from them about wanting more support. You'd pass them back to Canberra for them to take up or deal with it as they saw fit.

On some of those visits did you ever get to see much of other nation's peacekeeping deployments?

Yes, in the sense of meeting them. They were always there. And one of the

08:00 great advantages of that is for our people to mix with the other nations and spend time talking to them and find out or make some judgements about what standards they are at and what they think is important. Where they think their country is going and what the issues are. It is just great cross

fertilisation and at the same time promoting

08:30 Australia as a good place to live and as a responsible member of the international community but very importantly that we are a very competent and professional defence force.

Did you see enough that you were able to compare our forces to other forces?

Me personally?

Yes.

No, not on my visits, no. I couldn't say I saw that personally. Others would make that call that were there

09:00 for longer periods of time.

So you were in that role for four and a half years?

Yes, four and a half years.

And how did it come about that that time came to a close?

It was time for me to move. I had been there four and a half years and I was a very senior general at that stage of the game. The options open to me were to seek an overseas deployment in a UN mission or go to Canberra

09:30 and work in an office environment or leave. I didn't see that as a very difficult choice. It was time to go. I had had a wonderful career and I enjoyed everything I was doing and I was happy to leave on a high note. I didn't think that I could contribute as well in a Canberra environment as I had done as a land commander. In that sense I

10:00 think you need to operate in a bureaucratic environment that is largely committee environments. It is a means of putting forward a stated position and being able to compromise and negotiate and achieve those goals. I was coming from a background where I had been in a command situation whereas I was perhaps more used to hearing advice and making decisions rather than being one of the

10:30 advisor inputs. So I felt that I probably wouldn't serve the army as effectively as others could if I was in a staff position in Canberra.

That being the case was it still difficult to leave?

No, I was ready to go. I had had a wonderful career. I was fifty-four and I still had a lot of life left in me and it was just a good time to leave. I knew it was time to go.

11:00 **Does your last day in the army stand out?**

Yes. It was a great day. They very kindly videotaped that for me. I had a farewell at my headquarters and we had a morning tea and I spoke to the staff of the headquarters. Then they formed up on either side as my wife and I walked to my staff car and said

11:30 goodbye to the senior officers and hopped in the staff car and drove out of the gate. And that was it.

Were you out of uniform?

No, I was wearing my uniform. The only time I have been in a uniform since then is not long after I left to attend the funeral of a general that I had known well and had worked for. He asked me to deliver the eulogy at his funeral which I did. That is the only time I've worn a uniform since I left.

12:00 **Were you given a parting memento?**

There were lots of presentations. If you look carefully around here you'll see various items like statuettes and decanters and the like. People were very generous about that.

Did you have a plan for what you were going to do next?

Not really other than I was not going to have a full time job again. I didn't want to have a full time job again.

12:30 I just wanted to see where the path was going to take me eventually.

In the time since you've left have you missed it?

No, I haven't, not at all. I keep in touch of course with my old friends and the people who were important but I haven't really gone out of my way to maintain

13:00 contact with the organisation as such. They are very good in the sense that they send an army newspaper and General Cosgrove came up recently and gave us a briefing. From time to time we get sent various publications that keep us abreast to the extent that you want to be kept abreast. I'm sure if I wanted to find out something after a briefing I'm sure someone would give it to me. But I don't

13:30 have that need.

Just one other question while I think of it from your role as land commander. What was your overall view of our role on various peacekeeping missions and the appropriateness of that?

At the risk of being critical of government policy I thought we were in some places that we didn't need to be. I could see little purpose for us in the

14:00 Western Sahara. It wasn't our sphere of influence and it was a very unhealthy and unpleasant place to serve. It was very remote. There was nothing professionally to be gained from that deployment. I saw only marginal value in going to Somalia. I think the government took the right decision to limit the time to seventeen weeks. That was an important decision.

14:30 There was certainly value in taking the battalion of the operational deployment force, which had been trained up year after year after year that never went anywhere. We actually took them and we went through the exercise of deploying them and went across there and did that. And that was good. It was good for them. It was good training and a good training experience but in terms of strategic value to the nation it was probably pretty limited. Some of the other

15:00 UN deployments were of questionable and limited value.

Do you have an opinion on our role in Iraq at the moment?

In the sense of the way in which it came about it seemed to me that intelligence suggested there were weapons of mass destruction present and that there was a risk that a

15:30 terrorist group could get them then the answer to that is yes, if that was the premise of which the deployment went about. The deployment was done in a controlled sense. In other words we didn't have an unlimited deployment and we didn't put people at risk so I don't have a major issue with it. It hasn't worked

16:00 out as intended and perhaps that is not surprising given the nature of it. There were some warnings I think from quite a number of leaders of Arab nations that implied that there would be factionalism and difficulties in bringing the country under control. The fact that the intelligence appears to have been faulty is something that is very unfortunate

16:30 and I certainly feel great anguish for the Americans. I think it is a very difficult situation.

In your time as land commander if we had deployed troops to somewhere where you didn't necessarily agree with them being there did that ever make doing your job more difficult?

Well, I had the opportunity in the lead up to express an opinion as to the

17:00 viability and whether we could do it or not. I would have input into the advice that went to the government about the involvement. In the event they came back and my advice had been, for instance, "I don't think this is a good idea," and we were told to do it anyway then my choices were simple – resign or get on with it. There is no alternative.

17:30 In terms of having the opportunity to have a say I was always able to have input into the decision-making process.

Do you know of any circumstances where people did resign because they disagreed with policy?

None that readily spring to mind no. There were some frustrations. We were frustrated about going to Somalia because the

18:00 Operational Deployment Force from which we were going to take the majority of the battalion was going on leave or had gone on leave. And we had an indication, a strong indication that cabinet was likely to agree to the deployment. But for various reasons the cabinet meeting was delayed so every day that ticked past all the soldiers had just gone further and further away and were settling into their leave period. And we knew we were going to have

18:30 to recall them with all those difficulties and we couldn't do any planning. We were absolutely embargoed on talking to anybody or doing any planning. So that compressed everything and resulted in things like ships sailing the day before Christmas and so on and the day after Christmas which is not ideal when you are sending off people at short notice.

19:00 **What are your thoughts on PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]?**

Thoughts on it? I'm not sure what you mean by that. It is a medical condition. It is a mental disorder.

I'm just curious to know – obviously we've spoken to a lot of men who are affected by it and we speak to other men that not only aren't but think it is

19:30 **over exaggerated?**

I think it is a genuine condition in that sense. I think any individual reacts differently to circumstances

and some of us are able to undergo an experience and deal with it and move on. Others are so profoundly affected

20:00 by that experience and their personality is such that they are not able to move on from there and to deal with it. It is ever present. From what I know of dealing with veterans many of them have suppressed the anxieties that they have brought back by hard work and over indulgence in alcohol. So a lot of

20:30 symptoms of PTSD have been put down to abuse of alcohol and that has led to many unhappinesses as you can see patterns of frequent jobs and several marriages and abusive behaviour and all those things that are there. That is genuine behaviour. People don't do those things for fun or make them up and it is just kind of

21:00 sad. I think the unfortunate thing from what I've observed is they don't appear to be able to deal with it. It seems to me that in the process of undergoing treatment and diagnostics the reliving of the experience actually results in an aggravation or a worsening of the condition.

As an officer did you ever have any of your men coming to talk to you about PTSD?

Well, PTSD wasn't -

21:30 no one had ever heard of PTSD in those days. I wrote to my father at one stage and to my horror it was published in the paper. In that I refer to some instances of battle fatigue and soldiers did have those symptoms and they were dealt with by counselling. The view was then to

22:00 you'd give them a little break and leave them behind. We always had to leave ten soldiers behind to look after the base security when we were out on operations. We'd leave them behind for that operation and give them a chance to recover and then take them back out again. Some responded well to that and others needed treatment. One or two others didn't react well to going back out on the operation and had to be evacuated. Yes, there were instances there.

22:30 We were referring to that as battle fatigue or combat fatigue for somebody who couldn't cope with the situation.

How would you deal with that at the time?

You'd just have to talk it through. I had one soldier just about as we told him to get onto the helicopter say, "That's it. I'm not going." He threw his rifle down and said, "I can't go." I knew

23:00 the man. I knew that he was not a mischief maker or trouble maker. He was a very sincere, decent man and he wouldn't be doing this in front of all his colleagues if he wasn't sincere. I couldn't deal with him. I was about to get on the helicopter. I had to call the company sergeant major who was standing behind me and say, "Get him to the chaplain and get him to a doctor." He got some treatment and he stayed on as it turned out.

PTSD is

23:30 **obviously a term that has come up since Vietnam?**

Yes, in the late '70s it came into being.

It is most commonly associated with Vietnam vets [veterans]. It seems there are returned soldiers from places like Somalia also coming up with those ill affects?

And Timor as I understand it.

From what you saw in Somalia what are your thoughts on that?

Look, if you are asking me in

24:00 terms of would they have experienced instances that were so stressful to trigger that, the answer to that is yes, absolutely.

Have you suffered any ill affects from any of your service?

Not to my knowledge I haven't. Some of the reasons for that is probably because of my make up. I think being an officer you are less prone to

24:30 such an experience because you are fully occupied. You haven't got time to reflect on the day's events. You are planning the next day and there is always something to be done. You have got responsibilities so you are getting on with it in that sense. I think it is easier. I also think, and not everybody would agree with this point of view, that to

25:00 some extent those who were in the front line probably managed better than those at the back. It seemed to me that if I was down in Vung Tau doing supply work like getting rations in and sending them up the front that I did in a depot back here that would be much harder because you are away from your family and in a strange country and doing the same sort of work. Whereas

25:30 the combat troops were actually fighting and engaged with the enemy and fighting the war and busy and fully occupied and they had less time to contemplate and fret and do all those things.

When you talk about as an officer you are constantly busy and you don't have time to sit down and think about it let those feelings fester is it then quite a lonely life as an officer?

I don't think so. You are with people all the time.

26:00 It is not lonely in the sense that you are on your own and as a commander you don't expect to share your views that widely. There is a command structure and you get paid to make decisions. There are times when a participative approach is appropriate and you should seek opinions and say, "What do you think we should do?" But the bottom line is that you make the decisions. But often in the

26:30 battlefield events are happening that quickly and you have to make the decision and make it quickly. Right or wrong, we do that and get on with it. There isn't time for reflection or contemplation or whatever it is. Remember that you are making decisions in an uncertain environment. You don't know. You are trying to piece it together - there's some movement over there, there's some firing over there and somebody's been shot down here and there's some movement up the back – so you've got a bit of a picture.

27:00 Just how many people there are and what shape they are in there is this uncertainty about it so you are formulating a plan without total knowledge of what you are up against. And that is the feature of the battlefield. And one of the reasons why officers progress and are successful is that they are able to cope with uncertainty and operate in an unstable and

27:30 uncertain environment and keep that going whereas others aren't. Others like the certainty of, "What's there and what is happening next and where will I be at five o'clock tomorrow afternoon and will I get fed?"

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

I think it is good. I've always gone to Anzac Day. It is a good experience to get together. It is wonderful to see all the children and all the young people coming out now. It's had a really big

28:00 regeneration that has come through. I can remember as a young boy marching with my father and his battalion group. I'm not sure that I had great feelings or pride. It was just a kind of interest and curiosity I think about that but I certainly did march on a couple of occasions with my father. I have never had my sons march with me because I don't think (a) they'd be particularly interested and (b) I've never encouraged them and (c) they've often been

28:30 somewhere else than where I've been. I think what is happening is a great resurgence of interest.

Do you have service medals that belong to your father as well?

Yes, I do. I've never worn them but that's because they've never been properly mounted. I keep saying, "It's Anzac Day, I should get those mounted and wear them." I will one day I guess.

What do you actually think about on

29:00 **on Anzac Day?**

Good question. My thoughts would be a mixture of things. Obviously you think about the people that you know that aren't there. And I don't talk about just fallen comrades, those that were killed there, but also those that have died since for various reasons and those that are incapacitated and

29:30 struggling with life. I don't mean just physical capacity I mean those that are suffering with PTSD as well. I think of some of the really tight moments that we were in and think about the people that were involved in that. Also I think of valuing the friendship. This Anzac Day I marched with one of my platoon commanders and I haven't seen him for,

30:00 it must be twenty-five years. It was wonderful to see him. He had been wounded and evacuated back to Australia.

Some vets that we speak to talk of Anzac Day being an emotionally difficult day for them. Is that true for you in any way?

No it isn't. I see it as a time obviously to reflect

30:30 as I said on what happened and the unfortunate events but also for there to be some commemoration of all the good things like the comradeship and the standards that were there and the contribution that people made. It is that sort of mix. I think it is a time for veterans to get together that have shared that unique experience in the battlefield. It is a very uniting experience in the sense that

31:00 you have shared danger and you have shared comradeship. And in some ways I'd like to think it has tempered my emotion. I have risked my neck and I've been there and I've had some close shaves so the thought of death doesn't concern me particularly. I have been grateful for the life that I have. I think I have a very clear understanding of what is

31:30 important in life and what isn't. I can let a lot of trivial things go because a battlefield is a place to sort out what's really important and what isn't. So getting excited about whether a meal is hot or not hot I can't see the point about that for example.

What does come to you as being important?

The quality of friendship and trustworthiness

32:00 and sincerity in people is very important. I don't like insincerity I must admit. I am perhaps naïve in the approach that I assume that people have the same level of integrity and sincerity that I do and I'm disappointed if that proves to be not the case in my dealings with others.

How would like to see the younger generation preserve and

32:30 **observe the Anzac Day tradition?**

Well, that is a good question. At the moment we are going to have enough veterans coming through to march. You'd like to think in the years and decades ahead we won't have any veterans we will have achieved eternal peace. In that case what I'd like to see is still to have a national day and to have it in a forum of

33:00 commemoration services where we recognise the people who have given so much for their country and then in the afternoon some form of celebration that we are a free national and at peace. That form of celebration can be manifested in many forms. I don't have trouble with football games and sporting fixtures or festivals or whatever it is that people want to have but it should be preserved as a national day

33:30 and there should be a commemoration service to commemorate the sacrifice that all of those people over time have made. I think the parade is going to go on for a while yet. Some veterans get upset to see small children marching. They seem to think people obviously aren't veterans marching but I don't have an issue with that.

Do you have an

34:00 **opinion about whether or not national service should ever be reintroduced?**

I don't favour it unless we're really hard up against it. It's too expensive. We need people to develop the country. You spend time training somebody to be a servicemen and it is time spent when they are not learning how to build, erect, construct or develop or do something like build a highway or build a bridge which is more use in the long term

34:30 for the country. The second thing about National Service is that you've then got to take away a fair percentage of the regular forces to get on and train the national servicemen. What happens is that the training is by its very nature of a lower level. So you are having people constantly training in the simpler things of drill and basic field craft and so on rather than the

35:00 advanced techniques of soldiering. And the battlefield has become more complex and more technical so what it does is it lowers the standard of the regular forces. It drops them dramatically because they are operating at the bottom of the complexity of soldiering. So for those reasons I don't support the introduction of national service. A lot of people say to me we should have national service and sort these young people out. It's not the

35:30 army's fault that people aren't disciplined or need a hair cut. You want a defence force to defend the country and you're not there to keep law and order either. I don't particularly want to get involved or would not want to get involved in having to arrest citizens and supervise citizens. That's not what I'm about. I want to defend them and protect them but I don't want to have to in any way take law

36:00 enforcement measures against them. If I did want to do that I'd join the police force.

Do you think looking back that people in the armed forces and Australia's armed force itself have received sufficient recognition for the role they have played?

No, certainly not until recent times and I think the change has occurred with General Cosgrove and his support efforts in Timor.

36:30 He had the skills and the charisma to capture public opinion and carry the media forward with him. He has done that almost single-handedly and we now see the defence forces held in higher regard. I don't think there is any criticism so much it was just that they weren't there. They were getting on with it. There wasn't any need to do anything. We were always saying to the

37:00 politicians you should have an aide in a uniform. If you look at the American culture of the Commander in Chief and so on there are uniforms everywhere and flags and so on. We've never had that part of the culture but we've changed now. We've moved more into that. I'm not talking about being militaristic. Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm merely talking about the symbolism of the role of the defence force in the

37:30 hierarchy of the nation. You see that now much more so.

Looking back on your long and distinguished military career what is that you are most proud of?

I think the influence that I hope I have had on a lot of people that have worked for me that they have been better soldiers and leaders

38:00 as a result of that experience. That is what I'd like to think. In saying that I would remind you that one of the things I did say was that you also learn from watching your leaders make a lot of mistakes as well and I'm sure that I have done a lot of things that perhaps weren't done well and that they learned as much from them as the positive things that I've done.

Do you have any regrets of your time in the service?

A couple. I would have liked to have had a posting to

38:30 Canungra on the staff there. I was always breaking my neck to jump out of a plane and never did get to complete a parachute course. It's probably just as well I probably would have broken my neck. They are really the only ones and they re kind of insignificant.

If you think of this archive as being a type of time capsule do you have a

39:00 **message or final thoughts for future generations who might see this?**

I would urge them never to lose that wonderful quality of initiative. We are always going to be brave and courageous and friendly but it is that quality of initiative. That would be my urging of them to, if they see something that is not right, do something about it. And if they see something that needs doing, do it. Don't wait to be told, just get on with it. That's my message.

INTERVIEW ENDS