

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Stumer (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1883>

Tape 1

00:30 **Okay so we will start with the précis of your life?**

Well I was born at Boonah, that's in southern Queensland, in 1945. My parents were dairy farmers and they lived

01:00 at a little place called Bunjurgun, which was about four or five miles, in the old measurements, outside of Boonah and they sort of struggled as young people with a young family. I had an older brother and later on I acquired a younger

01:30 brother as well. I went to school at that little place called Bunjurgun, which was a one-teacher school. And because my parents were dairy farmers they changed farms often and so I went to about three or four different one-teacher school before I went to the big smoke which was Boonah

02:00 when I was in grade seven, I did my high school at Boonah right through to grade twelve. After that I went to teachers' training college in Brisbane at Kemadrin Park Teachers' College. I was called up while I was at teachers' college for the military and I was deferred

02:30 for two years. Thinking the war would be over by then, I thought I would be right and after teaching for on year I was taken into the military and I went to Singleton where I did recruitment corps recruitment training, and then about mid year 1968 I went to Townsville to join 6 RAR [6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment] and was housed at

03:00 Lavarack Barracks. Based there, I spent about ten months before going to Vietnam where I spent about six months. And then I was due to get out of the army so I came back to Australia and I was located at Brisbane in Enoggera Barracks. I had some leave prior to going back to Enoggera and

03:30 I left the army in February 1970 and I started teaching the next day at Boonah. I didn't have a class at that time but within a week I was transferred to East Ipswich, even though I was assured I would stay in the home town for a year after I got out of the army. I spent the rest of

04:00 my working life teaching at Ipswich, fourteen years at East Ipswich and eighteen years at North Ipswich and several years of casual work which is called supply teaching until last year when I stopped work altogether.

04:30 That's about it.

Okay lets go back and start with your very earliest memories?

Well pre-school I don't remember too much about it but preschool times were spent on a farm at Bunjurgun. I had an older brother who was eleven years older than I am.

05:00 I remember a few things about him but not too much from those times. I suppose I was regarded as a bit of a slow starter because I couldn't really talk until I was four years old. I actually started talking when my younger brother, who was just twenty-one months younger than I, started talking so

05:30 I think I needed an example. And I did start school at Bunjurgun state school which was a one teacher school, and I do remember my father used to take me on horseback and we had to cross the creek and he would more or less take me up there in the early stages.

06:00 I remember the next door neighbours had several children going to school and they had a pick up car and the father who was an ex-solicitor I remember, bought into a farm and the farm was next to us and he used to take me to school then along with his kids. So they are my main memories.

06:30 Preschool, well I do remember a few instances of preschool when my father used to take me with him when he was farming and I used to sit under the windmill and there was a tank stand there, but I do remember getting stung by wasps around the neck which was a bit of a traumatic experience for me.

My throat started to swell up and my mother and father, who didn't have a car,

07:00 and they had an emergency trip into Boonah by horse and sulky and I remember being stung by those wasps, I can still see the nest actually. But I don't remember the aftermath of it, but apparently it turned out alright.

Do you remember how they treated you?

Well my mother initially put what they called 'blue' which was used in washing,

07:30 I don't know what it consisted of but it must have been an antihistamine of some kind and that may have eased it slightly. So that was an old housewife trick for stings and so forth those days. Another instance I remember, same place, up the back paddock farming and my father and older brother were doing the fencing, I suppose my

08:00 brother must have been fifteen sixteen at that stage and he must have bought his first rifle. And the old boy was a really good shot so the son, Conrad - he was my brother - they decided to have a few shots at this round post and it seemed like a long

08:30 distance to me but it was probably only fifty metres or so, and the width of the post was about thirty centimetres I suppose in today's language and they had a target marked on it. Well they fired three shots and I can remember this very clearly, they fired three shots and they went up and had a look and my father said, "Oh there is one just clipped the post here.

09:00 That's yours, and the other two missed. " And I can remember him saying that. And he said, "They're mine right in the middle." And my brother said, "There is only two." And he said, "No, there is three." And he says, "No there is only two." And the old boy got his knife out and said, "I will show you that there is three in there." And he dug the lead out of them,

09:30 two lots of lead in the one hole. That was pretty good shooting and I do remember that clearly because I thought that was fantastic.

Can you describe Bunjurgun itself for us?

Bunjurgun is a farming community, the Teviott Brook flows through that and that's the creek that flows through Boonah.

10:00 And farms could be irrigated from the Teviot Brook I believe some were in those days, I am not sure whether my parents had irrigation or not. My parents grew mostly lucerne for lucerne hay and dairy cattle and a few small crops. Some of the next door neighbours, well down the road were big farmers.

10:30 with a big name around the town and so forth. At the end of our property there was a rest area on the road side of the property with sheds and so forth and toilet facilities like a picnic area. And they used to call it the black pinch and that was a swimming hole, a very deep swimming hole. Most of the time the Teviot Brook was flowing

11:00 but occasionally in dry spells it might have stopped flowing at a crossing at the end of our property. I remember my older brother used to often go swimming in the Teviot Brook along with some mates from across the road and so forth. They had swings out into the pool and

11:30 it was a well known picnic area for people from Boonah as well and they used to come out on weekends. Fresh water tank was there, so it was quite a good place to go. The school was just a little way up the road from the Teviot Brook hole, the black pinch along the road. In those days it was a dirt road

12:00 or a gravel road, but since it would have come a long way. The school no longer exists but I only did I think we called it preparatory, prep one and prep two. So I only did one year at Bunjurgun before going to another school which was

12:30 about ten kilometres away. My parents sold that property and bought another. At Bunjurgun I do recall probably because I was late to talk that I couldn't say all of my letters properly and I think the teacher regarded me as a bit of a no hoper.

13:00 I was not overly determined to be a great student in those days, being so young and immature and not knowing what was going on around me. But I think the teacher he sort of regarded me as one of the dodos[dunces] of the class and I can remember he was a bit condescending in his

13:30 attitude and I think that was because I had a speech impediment. Couldn't say my R's properly. That was one thing and since my name began with R I didn't say Robert I said "Wobbert", couldn't roll my Rs.

How many kids would have been in that first school?

Oh about thirty.

14:00 Thirty in that little one teacher school. one teacher in those days probably handled about thirty in a one teacher school or even more.

What did you think of the teacher?

I didn't have any great thoughts, I thought he was a stern fellow, but I don't have any great lasting thoughts, or anything. So far in the past, I don't remember too much from then.

14:30 **And having a speech impediment did you get teased?**

Perhaps a little bit by the older ones, but it didn't seem to concern me much.

And your younger brother, did he come through that same school?

No he didn't he came to the next school which was also a farming school.

So they were essentially farmers' children?

Yes they all would have been farming children.

15:00 There were no stores or anything around there, so everybody came from a farming community.

Did you have chores to do around the farm?

Not at that age. At that age I was dependant on my parents and didn't do anything really. See I was only six years old when I left Bunjorgen.

15:30 I started school at four years and ten months and finished at Bunjorgen the following year. And so we then went to a farming community called Milford. It was a hill country farming community. Rather than creek flat [as in Bunjorgen] the soil and everything there wasn't as fertile. My

16:00 parents still did dairy farming with some other mixed crops which was okay in the hilly country. There was a gully running through the farm but the water wasn't as permanent at Teviot Brook. But yes we did get some water from that gully but it wasn't probably enough to irrigate. We had some large

16:30 dams on that property, the landscape allowed the dams to be built and I can remember my parents had a deep well in addition. So water was going that way, and windmills and so forth, so the windmills would [pump] water for the cattle and the cattle would get water from the dams, about three dams we had on the property.

17:00 I remember the house as a great old "Queenslander"[traditional timber house]. Today people would give their eye teeth for that house, it was a beauty.

Can you act as though you are a camera and walk us through the house?

Yes. It was in a prominent position on the top of a hill with two dams set below, and the house had

17:30 stairs at the front and side. The front side came down to a landing and then a set of stairs came down from each side of that landing. It had a gable at the top and verandas around all three sides facing out towards the dams and over the valley, down towards where the school was.

18:00 It was a very good outlook. The verandas would have been about nine feet wide with those cylindrical timber railings and double hand rail at the top. The kitchen, dining room, bathroom, was set

18:30 at the back where there was no veranda. The dining room itself was very large and in the house itself there was four bedrooms. The floor was wide board pine and excellent type material. I think they would have been about eight inches wide, at least six, but I think about eight. And the floors were

19:00 in a couple of rooms polished and the other two had linoleum on them. The kitchen, well there was a stove recess which had an old wood stove. And you heated your water, it had a tank on the side of it and the water was heated when the stove was lit.

19:30 I did acquire an old wood stove lighter from my mother when she died, but I have since got rid of it. That was a fantastic way of cooking and living as I remember it. Used to heat the kitchen up nicely in the winter. We didn't have refrigeration, we didn't have electricity. It was before those times.

20:00 We did have an ice chest and this ice chest was located on the section of the veranda near the kitchen and the ice was delivered from Boonah about once every three days as I remember. Block ice, they used to make it in town near the butter factory. The butter

20:30 factory was the hub of the district where they made cream. Where they converted cream to butter. Milk wasn't bottled or anything there. Anybody who wanted to produce milk had to send it to Ipswich. And I don't think a lot was sent there, most production in that district was cream and then butter from that.

21:00 Most people, what they did with their milk, they would have had calves and pigs on most farms and the milk would have been fed to those.

So your parents' dairy farming produce would have gone to the butter factory?

The cream would have gone to the butter factory.

- 21:30 The cream carter as they called him, used to pick the cream up every second day and he would take it into the butter factory. On the return trip he would bring the ice and sometimes products from town because my parents didn't have a car, sometimes he would bring a shopping order from town. Every
- 22:00 farm had a cream box out the front gate, big enough to put all of the cream cans in and supplies in when it was brought back. Mail was brought back by the cream carter as well, so he did a big job in those days for the farming community. Now we didn't have much room in this ice chest. The top part was taken up by putting the ice in
- 22:30 and the bottom part which was made out of zinc oleum you put your food in. but it was nothing like the size of the refrigerators today, you could only put a small amount in it. So you also had meat safes and so on. There is an example of an old meat safe now, it had zinc oleum down the side, I have since changed that side because we couldn't get the
- 23:00 zinc oleum. There were other meat safes made out of metal and they hung in the breeze and all around the side was zinc oleum with holes in it so that the breeze would go through and you would put your meat in there and it would last three or four days with the breeze keeping it cool. You also put your butter in there because at room temperature in the summer the butter would be
- 23:30 just oil. So what you did with the butter: you had a bowl and in the middle of the bowl you had a block and you filled that bowl with water up to the height of the block, and you put your butter on top of the block, and when the breeze blew through the holes in the side it picked up the moisture of the water in the bowl and cooled it down. That's how it was kept
- 24:00 so that the butter didn't melt. It was soft but it didn't melt to oil.

What did family meals consist of?

Similar things to today. I can't remember, but we always had vegetables and some meat and so forth. We grew our own vegetables, although we occasionally bought some. Potatoes, beans and peas, in season we had those ourselves.

- 24:30 And pumpkins and that sort of stuff. Vegetables weren't a problem and often you could keep a supply of those things to last you the winter anyway. Maybe not the green vegetables, but the others like pumpkins and potatoes. You would have a supply which would last most of the winter months.
- 25:00 I can remember as a kid that my mother used to always say, "Eat up your greens, otherwise you don't get any dessert." I had no trouble doing that and I usually ate my brother's as well, but he always ended up getting the dessert. I don't know what the rightness about that was, I think I ended up heavier than he was as we grew up.
- 25:30 My father on that property produced other things as well. Other crops such as corn. We harvested our own corn, had what was called a corn sheller and you would do it by hand; you would operate a handle and put the cobs in a box at the top and they go through the sheller and they would shell all of the grains
- 26:00 off the corn and he would sell that corn to the markets or sometimes feed it to the pigs as well with various other stuff that he would produce. But that corn could be bagged and sold. And didn't sell a lot of hay because he used the hay for poor times to feed the cattle when there wasn't much lucerne around in the winter time, for example.
- 26:30 You would have a large hay shed on the property and the hay was usually just brought in and stacked in the shed, we didn't bale it at that time.

Did you have a favourite place either in the house or on the farm?

We just roamed anywhere my brother and I. Yes, we liked going down to the scrub, we had ten acres of scrub

- 27:00 at the back end of the property. The property was about a hundred acres and the ten acres of scrub was valueless at the time because we couldn't use it. But yes we enjoyed going into that and sometimes got lost and playing in the gully, pulling up rocks and finding the eels and so forth. There wasn't much
- 27:30 other in regard to fish, perhaps a few perch or something like that. Plenty of eels, which we didn't like eating. We used to go fishing in the dams as well and catch the eels out of them. My mother used to eat them but we didn't like them. We had some fruit trees.
- 28:00 We had some custard apple trees growing near the house and bananas and various other fruits like oranges and lemons, we had a bush of them down the property, they just grew wild along the gully so in season that's where we got our lemons. Oranges were grown by my parents and bananas they were also grown.
- 28:30 Because it was hilly they would be all right near the house. Pawpaws [papaya], they were all grown.

Apart from catching eels, what would you do to entertain yourself?

That's stretching my imagination a bit, I can't remember too much about it. Build cubbies [playhouses]

and things in the winter and that sort of thing.

29:00 We had a big veranda. I can remember riding bikes and things around this veranda and we would come to grief occasionally. Yeah it was great days.

Did you have a favourite game or toy?

I don't recall a favourite toy or anything. I suppose we played those old games like hide and seek and

29:30 whatever you call it as kids. But at the moment I can't recall too much about what we did to play. As far as going to school it was a big effort for us to go to school. We had to walk to school. It wasn't all that far, it was about a kilometre to school. It was downhill on the way and

30:00 didn't take us long to get to school at all. But on the way back it used to take us a hell of a time. We would dawdle and get up to mischief on the way home. When I think about it, they had a huge well, it was on the foot of the hill and it was on the edge of the road. It wasn't in anyone's property and there was a hole in the boarding at the top and we used to drop rocks down there and wait for them to hit the water. Well the water was

30:30 so far, I believe it was something like ninety feet, which is about thirty metres, and it was a long way to the water. When I think of it, and a lot of young kids going by there in those days, if anyone had fallen down it would have been 'goodbye', well and truly. But oh yes, we got up to mischief and got into trouble for it. There was a gully going down past that well, there is a church down the bottom of the hill, I think it was a Methodist Church, and the

31:00 gully went down the back of that and through the school grounds actually, the lower part of the school grounds. And the school there had a house play shed and school building on the upper part of the school grounds, and next door was a shop and a Mr. Harper owned the shop.

31:30 And then the bottom oval there was probably ten acres that belonged to the school and there was a cricket pitch there. The gully flowed further over beyond the cricket pitch and then there was a tennis court over further on the other side of that lower section. I do remember the school had a sort of a plot beside it where the teachers did something like agricultural science

32:00 and all of that sort of thing, planted vegetables and the kids handled that sort of thing. I was in the lower part of the school then. Grades one two and three, I completed at that school before I shifted again. And even though we had shifted from that property before the end of my time at the

32:30 school we still came to that school from another direction when we were on another property. So I spent about four years there. And that teacher, as soon as I arrived, he set about fixing my problem with speech and I can always remember he had me and he had one other kid and we would come out and practice these rolling the tongue exercises.

33:00 And that was a very good thing for me because I ended up rolling my tongue and by the time I was eight years old I could say my Rs properly. My mother was a very religious person and I remember we went to Sunday School followed by church on Sundays when I was very young, because I had to tag along you see? And so did my brother.

33:30 And I can remember on one occasion at Sunday School the bigger kids would go into their Sunday studies about fifteen minutes before the others, and I was a sort of a laid back kid, as well in later life I was laid back as well. As a kid I knew how to pick my mark and so forth and these big kids

34:00 one morning they were picking on me on the church steps. They would ask me to say my name and of course I would say "Wobbert". And I would just laugh along with them and they would say this several times, and then they would get called in for studies. And then the little kids about my size and age they would ask me to say "Robert" and of course I gave them the old one two.

34:30 And got into a bit of trouble with the Sunday School teacher. My mother was a Sunday School teacher but she wasn't mine.

What sort of a lady was your mother?

In those days women didn't have jobs out in the community or anything, and she was a housewife.

35:00 And she was very good mother, she looked after her children well, did the housework and so forth. Helped a little bit on the farm, not a lot. Did the vegetable gardens and so forth. She was a plumpish lady. Five foot three would see her out, less that a hundred sixty centimetres

35:30 in today's mode. And the old boy he was tall and thin and athletic. For his vintage he was a pretty tall guy. It was considered in those days that a six-footer was a pretty tall guy and I can remember having photographs of his football team and he was the tallest fellow in the football team.

36:00 These days six foot is probably average in football teams.

Were mum and dad very strict?

Not really. For the times. We might consider compared with today there was a strictness about them but they weren't strict for the standards of those times. I think

36:30 I had a good childhood. The old boy didn't have a lot to do with us. My mother, as a young kid I can remember she used to play musical instruments like piano. She had one in the house, and a piano accordion and a mouth organ and those sorts of things. And I can remember as a young kid she would play them when we

37:00 went to bed and sing songs or whatever. She was quite accomplished at those things, in the church choir and what have you. We were pretty well looked after.

Who would you say ran the house, mum or dad?

Oh no doubt my mother, no doubt. The old boy was pretty quiet and kept to himself and no doubt my mother ran the house.

37:30 In those days on special occasions you would kill a pig or whatever and have it for a special occasion like Christmas. And I used to watch as my older brother and father

38:00 and we might have even had a neighbour help out, kill the pig and gut it scald it and take the hair off the skin and whatever and prepare it. More or less prepare it. And I do believe he had a smoke house as well, sawdust and cow manure and he smoked some of his old meat, like a sausage.

38:30 Old German family and traditional wurst [sausage] he made his own in the smoke house. But not a great deal, only when he felt like special occasions, around Christmas and things like that he would make wurst.

When you say it was an old German family,

39:00 **how long had it been in Australia?**

It dates back to 1870 coming to Australia. The Stumer family came to Australia on a ship called the Humboldt in 1870. Originally they settled in the Boonah District and the old Stumer family had the first shop in Boonah. It wasn't actually in the place where Boonah now stands,

39:30 it was where the Dugandan Hotel is, that was the site of the first shop and that was the site of the old Stumer family shop. It had an earth floor and the old fellow's name was Karl, I think. And if you go to that hotel today you will see a picture of the original shop in the lounge room of the hotel.

40:00 Also there is a picture of my father and brothers. If my father was alive today he would be a hundred and four years old. He was born in 1899, December 1899 so he married late and I wasn't born until he was forty-five years old; and he was forty-seven when my younger brother was born. So he was an older person, that's how I remember him.

40:30 He was a sort of a pioneering person. I can remember him telling us that he worked on the farm by day, his parents' farm with his brothers, and at night they would shoot possum. Possum was not a protected species in those days and they would get so much money for their pelts. Council would pay so much money for

41:00 their pelts. So he derived an income, and his brothers would use shotguns and take dogs with them at night. I could show you a picture of a night's work

41:30 where the possum skins are all laid out on a barn wall, and the three brothers are sitting in front of them all with their shotguns, that was taken in 1926. So yes, they would have had an enjoyable time I imagine.

41:53 End of tape

Tape 2

00:30 **So dad did the odd spot of possum shooting?**

Yes he did the odd spot of possum shooting and he was regarded as a good shot. Also he used to tell us a few stories about his shooting prowess. His main weapon was a shotgun and as a sport he did

01:00 pigeon shooting. In those days they didn't have the clay pigeon, they had real pigeons, and they used to let them go out of boxes two at the time and they had two barrels on the shotgun and you were expected to bring both pigeons down. It is a bit different from clay pigeons because the pigeon will tilt his wings and move and it is actually harder skill to bring down a real pigeon than the clay

01:30 disc because it fires in a straight line.

Did you ever see any of this?

No I didn't see he was younger then. And he apparently got second in Queensland or something so that was his claim to fame with the shotgun. I don't think he ever did any clay pigeon shooting. By that time it was

02:00 he had given up any sport or anything like that by that time. I still have a single barrel old shotgun that I have in the photograph over there. And I know the date on the gun in 1902, that's was when it was manufactured, made in America that's where it was made. And I haven't fired it in

02:30 recent times but I daresay it is still fine.

Did they teach you to shoot?

We more or less taught ourselves how to shoot .As a kid I had air guns and things like that and he might have told us a few basic things, but we sort of worked it out ourselves. We used air guns. I wasn't

03:00 one of these to go around just shooting things needlessly, I liked to shoot targets but I used to go with some of my mates before we were out of primary school we would go and shoot various things. Some of my mates, whatever we shot they would put in the stew pot and that was their meat, they didn't buy their meat, they

03:30 couldn't afford to because many of them were very poor and didn't have a regular job. So I can remember actually going shooting and you might think this is cruel at heart, rosellas [parrots] they used to be in the tops of the gum trees on the flowering gums during the day and they were quite hard to bring down with a small air gun from the top of a

04:00 gum tree. But we would have a bag full and they would go home and mate would pluck them and they would stew them and whatever.

Did you ever taste them?

Yes I did, the soup was okay. But then you had other birds, the brown pigeon and the top knot and all of those sorts of things.

And specific type of flavour?

Well they were a bit bushy

04:30 but if they were eating grain they tasted all right. Now they need to be eating grain to lose some of that wild taste. They don't have a terrific wild taste the wild pigeons, the wildest taste probably comes from animals like hare, but if you let that sit,

05:00 hang for a few days they call it, you get rid of some of the taste, or you can marinate it, you can get rid of that taste. Yes my father would shoot a hare now and again and we would eat it. Have it in soup and what have you, duck or whatever.

You were talking about how an animal would be slaughtered for Christmas, how were Christmases celebrated?

05:30 Christmases were celebrated as they are today but perhaps made more of a thing of it than today perhaps. You spent more time off over Christmas, and were more relaxed over those few days. I remember we had this great hoop pine growing down in the scrub, this is when I was between six and eight

06:00 or whatever it was. Great hoop pine growing down in the scrub and the old fellow and mother would go down and whack a few branches off the bottom part and we would set up our own Christmas tree in a bucket or a drum and decorate it and it would last a few weeks, and it would be in the living room for a few weeks. Presents all around that. Same sort of thing as today only they use artificial ones today.

06:30 And then of course the mother was sort of churchy so we would go to Sunday school and put on the performance for the adults and we would have Christmas at the church. And gifts given out to the kids and lollies and so forth. You probably had those experiences too, I don't know. They were probably good

07:00 experiences to look back on, that's being a young kid you know. My school time at Milford, school was again a one teacher school. This time I remember I was in a class of about seven, but for some reason or other it must have been the crops they

07:30 ate up that way because I was the only boy in the class. Six girls. So they made a bit of a fuss over me from time to time. And if the teacher sent us out to do some reading by ourselves in, what did they call that? Oh the bush house. It had seats in and so forth, reading by ourselves they would take turns at giving me, and this I hated because I was only seven

08:00 or eight at the time, they would take turns at giving me a bit of a pash and all of that, so there was no reading done. Of course, with a one teacher school you couldn't be with every class all of the time. And I came on a bit at my school work. I can remember, you would have exams in those days, have marks

- 08:30 given, not like today when you get artificial ratings, should I say that? And so you would get given marks and nobody thought it was degrading or anything for someone to be bottom of the class, well they might have thought it was degrading I don't know. But you were given marks and I
- 09:00 can remember I used to come second in that class of seven or eight. The teacher's daughter was the one to beat and she was a bit good for me.

Having gone onto a career in teaching when you look back on those schools with one teacher to seven or eight kids, how do you see that as being a good or bad thing?

I thought it was a great thing because

- 09:30 you were given responsibility in a one teacher school. The kids in upper classes tended to take lower classes for those things and then they had the responsibility, they could actually function themselves, the school could be run by the kids if the head teacher was a good head teacher. He would have the school operating by itself.
- 10:00 So kids in upper classes would monitor kids in lower classes or even you could even have a kid in your own class taking the others on a rotational basis. So you learnt skills of not only learning, you learnt how to be a leader or something like that as well. And you took turns at doing this and I guess he
- 10:30 could determine who was going to be the best leaders and so forth as well. So they were good schools to learn at.

And did you have homework?

Yes, always had homework going through school. In fact homework always took a long time to do. You had exercise book and you had to do an exercise every weekend

- 11:00 and you wrote in pen and ink, not biro and you couldn't spill blobs of ink or anything otherwise you were in strife. I suppose it was a good experience. We learnt how to do good handwriting. And write with a good hand even though in a hurry,
- 11:30 today I can write in a good hand, but I also have a hand for usual day stuff as well.

And were there teaching methods used then that just aren't used now?

Yeah many. A lot of rotational things, know your number facts and so forth and know your spelling. A lot of things learnt by rote but that was good in a way,

- 12:00 you really commit those things to memory. When I got to bigger classes you just walked out and knew that you knew certain number facts. Who today would know that twenty-five squared is six hundred and twenty-five or twenty-two squared is four hundred and eighty four?
- 12:30 And you retain those things and that was done by rote. See that's a basis for a lot of this rote stuff and instant response to it is a basis for doing other maths as well, you don't have to look things up and so forth, you can do it quicker, but of course you have got a calculator today too.

And so then you went to high school after primary school?

I went to another primary school after that one.

13:00 After Milford?

Yes another country one. We moved from Milford to a place called Happy Valley, Happy Valley was on the outskirts of Boonah, it was about two miles to the south. There was a little community there, no shops but a housing community and it was within the town limits and we actually had town water there. My parents were on the outskirts of that

- 13:30 community and they had about twenty acres or so plus a farm further over that someone else operated. So the farm went down to creek flat. This Happy Valley was located on the main road through to the south and the school that we chose to go to the country school,
- 14:00 Dugandan, which was to the south. To the north was Boonah and where we were was half way between the two. My mother chose to send us to Dugandan. We originally went to Milford which was to the east of that place but it was a bit far and it was a fair way to walk through bush track and whatever. But we had great times going to Milford along that bush track, did we what! And there was an orchard on the way.
- 14:30 Well we had the furthest to go but we would pick up a fellow on a pony and some others and by the time we got to the school we might have had a dozen kids going that way. And on the way home we would all get into this orchard in season and we would have pears and apples and whatever and watermelons and we would gorge ourselves. And I just wonder what the orchardist would have thought. And of course there was
- 15:00 the corn patch. Harry Prukrat owned the corn patch, he was the superintendent of the Sunday School and he owned these corn patches. And they were in the scrub, right in the sticks. And they young

creamy corn was really good. So into the corn patch, sit down under the trees on the road; and there was a little gully going along and we would catch these penny turtles.

15:30 We were about eight or nine at the time, well I was. And a few years later Harry happened to say to us, "You know the crows are bad out at that corn patch I have in the hills there. Particularly near the road. I don't get much corn off that corn patch, it doesn't grow so well near the road."

16:00 And I know he knew we knocked it off but we didn't let on. He obviously knew.

We hear so many stories about people doing that, it just amazes me that they let it slide?

Well that was what they were like. Harry, I had a lot of respect for Harry, he was a wily Sunday School teacher and he was also the town's best tennis player. He

16:30 was 'Mister Tennis' and he did show me a few things about tennis. Down at Happy Valley where I lived my next door neighbour had a tennis court, just an ants' nest court, make it yourself. You know the ants that built the clay type nest, so you would get in on a tractor and slide and come in and make your own tennis court. But the next door neighbours

17:00 had this tennis court and in our back yard my mother bought this paddock and it had this cricket pitch, cement cricket pitch in it, so myself and my younger brother and two next door neighbours we would play cricket in the summer every afternoon and tennis in the winter every afternoon. So we even made our own netting wire backstop so we didn't have to fox[chase] the balls if we missed, that's in cricket.

17:30 And it was just great. My brother and I would be down at his place every afternoon playing tennis in the winter and in the summer we would play cricket. Brother and I were medium pace bowlers but we could bowl spin as well because we just practiced everything all of the time. We had our own rules, if you hit the ball in the air you were out. It was tougher rules

18:00 that the rule game because you get away with those things if there is no fielders there. But if we hit the ball in the air for a certain distance you're out. So we had to keep it down. We weren't coached. What we learnt we learnt ourselves, but Harry did coach us a little bit in tennis so we got all side on and everything. And basically had the right grips and so forth, but we did it ourselves, we couldn't really fix up each other's

18:30 mistakes. But we did well and I know my next door neighbour became an excellent tennis player, the fellow with the tennis player, the elder one of the two. I can remember him going for tennis in Brisbane at age fourteen, never played on grass court before and he got to the finals of the singles and won the doubles with a Brisbane coach's son and he had a cold at the time.

19:00 But he actually played Geoff Masters-I don't know if you remember that name, he played for Australia - and was beaten by Geoff in the final. And never been to Brisbane before and never played on grass before and never coached. But because he played so much he could do anything with a tennis ball.

Did you ever play competition tennis?

Oh yes.

19:30 I started as a junior and I continued playing until I was in the army and when I got out of the army I came to Ipswich and I didn't play. But I did play tennis when I was a veteran, I used to play squash and this bloke said, "Have you ever played tennis?" and I said, "A long time ago." So I went and played veterans' tennis when I was forty-four or something. And I played veterans' tennis for about ten years here in Ipswich

20:00 and also in Brisbane. And I have got a tennis court up the back there which is not used any more but my sons play tennis and my youngest son is a good tennis player. He was in the first year at grammar school and they were runners up in Queensland for the national schools tennis championship.

20:30 Gregory Terrace pipped them and he went onto win the national one. So he has got something over in the shed as a memento from that. But he played every weekend for the grammar school in the tennis season and they had to play to the best of three sets and in order to get in the first the coach made them play the circuit before, circuit southern Queensland with the adults and

21:00 he was playing for money in those days, so he got to a good standard. But he didn't play any more when he left.

I am guessing at the small schools you went to there probably wasn't much opportunity for organised sports?

No. Not the small schools, but at Milford they had enough kids who played cricket at lunch time, and we would clear the tennis

21:30 court ourselves, grow grass over the summer and we would get hoes out and scrape it ourselves and roll it or whatever. And same at Dugandan school, they had an old tennis court there and I probably instigated that but there weren't as many kids at Dugandan School so it was a bit more difficult to get any team going. Like we taught ourselves to do the various things. High jumping or whatever.

22:00 And that was an interesting one because at the time, 1956, Jim Porter came second in the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 and he was beaten by an American called Dumat, a Negro, and this fellow made a film about the straddle [jump],

22:30 it was one of those sixteen millimetre things that you put up on the screen. And we would get that film from the education batch and we would run it and watch his style. And so we would go down and practice it ourselves, where the high jumping was. When I then went on to grade seven I didn't do it much, I just did the scissors because no one else did it or whatever.

23:00 But when my brother came to high school in grade eight he had been doing it himself at this school, and he could jump higher than the seniors, grade twelve, in grade eight by doing this straddle. I thought "well we have got to do the straddle," so it took me three weeks to jump higher than I could with the scissors by using the straddle. Practicing myself we worked out what we had to do and remembering the film we would practice three times a week.

23:30 And I got to the point where I could knock off everyone in south Queensland with the straddle, so I went and represented the school down in Brisbane for state secondary for high jumping. I did pretty well, I didn't win it but I did pretty well. And the school also did well, we only had five competitors down there but they were all

24:00 placed, so we were happy about that. It was only a little school. In fact we finished up with more points than some of the big schools like Kav Road and whatever.

So high school was at Boonah was it? What was that like?

We didn't have a lot of kids at the high school, only kids from the local area and it only went to junior, which was grade ten at that point in time.

24:30 But my parents actually enrolled me in St Peters College in Brisbane for grades eleven and twelve but they started a senior class, grades eleven and twelve in Boonah in the year I was due to go, so I went to the local one and didn't have to pay to go to the boarding school.

Were you looking forward to going away?

In a way but

25:00 it was a big thing when they didn't earn much money. They just relied on income from the farm and of course most farmers had huge debts to pay the farm off and so most of the income went to pay off the farm. And my father, in the wintertime he would get a job in the local sawmill and do the dairying as well and then work in the local sawmill

25:30 seven to four. So he would be up at four in the morning, milk whatever cows had to be milked and walk to the mill which was about a mile away and in the afternoon four o'clock he would come home and do it again. And so he had the two jobs in the winter because the cattle didn't produce as much in the winter. And many of them were what we would call dried out.

26:00 Didn't produce anything during the winter, so he had this second job during the winter.

So when your boarding life in Brisbane was canned, what were your feelings?

Well it didn't worry me because my mates were at Boonah and the higher achievers went on to grades eleven and twelve. And

26:30 if I went to Brisbane it would have been great for sport, because I used to read how they performed in their associated schools, whatever they were in. I had a cousin who played rugby union for Queensland and he was a good athlete as well. And then there was this bloke who went onto play league for Easts in New South Wales, I have forgotten what his name was, big burly fellow.

27:00 He broke every discus and shot put record in the associated school and I think they still stand. He was a freak this guy, Harris that was his name, Harris I remember. He was a winger for Easts for many years but he was not a lightweight he was quite a big fellow. And he did actually go and try gridiron [football] in America,

27:30 big ugly looking creature. But St Peters, at the time they produced some union players who went onto play for Australia, the halfback for Australia was a fellow called Rod Howser and he went to St Peters when he did school and he was around my vintage.

So at this stage you were in year ten were you thinking about what you might like to do when you finished senior?

28:00 Yes I always had it in my mind to be a teacher or a pilot, kids at a young age, planes were a big thing in those days. When we were out at Milford on that farm on Sunday they used to bring a couple of Tiger Moths [trainer biplanes] up for joyrides and people would go and have

28:30 be passengers on a Tiger Moth, and they would fly right beside our house on the farm over that area. So the old Tiger Moth was a big go then. And people would look up in the sky. You would hear a plane and

people would look up in the sky, we are talking about 1950s and here weren't too many planes around. So the

29:00 Tiger Moth was a great thing for the joy flight, I think they have a few of those in the museum at Temora at the moment.

Also I was just wondering being at the back of Amberley, Boonah is in the area did you see a lot of aircraft from the base?

Not a lot. They may not have used that as a training area we did see the odd Lincoln [bombers] go over, in

29:30 fact up in the ranges south of Boonah, Mount Superba is the highest mountain in that area they have a wreck of a Lincoln. I went up there once later on but there was not much there and it is hard to access, a lot [of fittings, equipment] has been knocked off I would say, all overgrown. But it happened a

30:00 a while before, it was probably just post Second World War, so that was an old Lincoln. But as far as passenger planes go, not many, no. But way back even in the 30s - Boonah is not far from the Lamington area -

30:30 a Stinson [passenger plane] crashed there, it received a lot of notoriety but see that was well before I was born. I think it happened 1929 or 30.

So it is obvious where you got your fascination with flying, what about teaching?

School appealed to me, I liked the sport side of things, I did well

31:00 at school until I got lazy in high school. Like most boys, I used to come close to the top of the class in grade six seven and eight, and then with too many things to interest me I fell back a bit, never did my homework and things. But I got there eventually.

Later when you were at High School, was there ever a teacher that you idolised?

31:30 No but I got on well with most of the teachers there. Some I didn't get on well with. But I got on well with some, like there was a fellow called Ray Bilby I got on well with him, he was an English and History teacher and I got on well with a couple of others, a fellow called Maxwell he was a maths teacher.

32:00 I won't mention the names of the ones I didn't get on well with. I really went to school to play sport. Our only interschool sport was just again Beaudesert, Cleveland or Bingly those places. Occasionally we would have a sports meet in Ipswich and it would include Ipswich, Gatton,

32:30 and whatever around the place, even Rosewood. I don't know if they had a high school there but I think Rosewood was represented; if it wasn't it might have been Rosewood, Laidley, have they got a high school there? Might have been Laidley.

33:00 **So what were the things distracting you from your studies in high school? Sports?**

Yeah mainly and the girls of course, any boy is distracted by, young fellow, be a bit of a freak if he wasn't distracted by the women. We would go on the hunt a fair bit for female company.

33:30 Well one good way to get to know someone was to play tennis with them socially. And of course they had the local picture theatre, that was the local venue to meet on a Saturday night, very little TV, while TV was around I can remember from the age of about eleven or twelve we had TV the old black and white,

34:00 but you still went to the pictures of a Saturday night in Boonah. They had a theatre there. And dances. As you got into grade eleven and twelve, various times you had a dance organised during the term or at the end of the term, that was a dance for the high school kids

34:30 or select high school kids, they would just go to some person's place

And did you do dancing at school?

Yeah we did in grade seven and eight. We had a teacher who did old time dancing and I went to the dances but I am the type of fellow who has got six right feet and only one or two left feet, so a little bit out

35:00 of tune with music. I am not a muso even though everybody tried to make me one, even in the army. I am not really a good muso because I don't have a good beat about me, I can't even keep time well. But Corinne here my wife is a dancer and still goes to dances

35:30 but I don't go with her. I was interested in doing the jive they called it, jive because you didn't have to have any real co-ordination for that. And the twist, they were things of the 60s. Jive and twist and a couple of other things, you just made up things or improvised and could easily do the things that were acceptable in it.

36:00 And so that's what we all did, we didn't do this old time stuff that we were taught.

And so what sort of music would be?

Well the music of those times would be I am not even great at remembering that sort of thing. There was two types of music, three types actually. Folk music,

36:30 country and western and then you know the stuff like the Beatles rock and roll and that sort of stuff. That's what everyone was interested in. But I can tell you it didn't appeal to me as much as some of the old country and western or folk music that appealed more to me than the rock and roll. But everyone else, I joined in with everyone else.

37:00 Corinne, come on you tell me in the background, who was the guy who was the Australian who had a bit of a beat about him? Johnny O'Keefe, yeah I didn't mind him. Actually later on he went to Vietnam to sing for the boys over there. Johnny O'Keefe, I didn't mind him at all, he went to America and didn't make it for some reason or another, I couldn't see why.

37:30 I reckoned he was better than a lot of the others. I was sort of rapt in his music and his lifestyle with the cars you know.

Were there any movie stars that were heroes at that time?

Not really. I wasn't really into the movies. I remember Lee Marvin was an actor, I thought was pretty good In

38:00 fact I watched something the other night with Lee Marvin in from the 1960s 65 or something. He won an Oscar for a thing called Cat Ballou, I don't know if you remember that? It was a bit of a throw off at westerns, but I thought it was a beauty at the time. I still do. And he was in Paint Your Wagon later on but I didn't think that was as good.

38:30 There were other actors, don't ask me the real life actors names, because I forget them.

What about sports stars, did you have your sports stars?

I have probably forgotten them now too. In 1961 I was going to school and they had the tied test in Brisbane, that was Richie Benaud and I think Ian Meckiff was no balled in that test by Umpire Eggar

39:00 for chucking and he was taken off. Wes Hall and Frank Worrell was the captain of the West Indians. Sobers, and all of those sorts of blokes were in that team. Yeah that was quite exciting at that time, I did go to watch a few games in Brisbane. I watched the Poms [English] once play Australia in Brisbane.

39:30 Who were the openers? Ted Dexter was the captain and Parfitt was one of the opening batsmen I remember and Graham McKenzie was the opening bowler for Australia. Of course you had different rules in those days. He was a fellow who was a perfectionist, he was able to perfect to the extreme the drag as a bowler,

40:00 he would drag his right foot as he bowled which enabled to him to actually deliver the ball about a half a metre beyond the crease. His back foot, being half a metre beyond the crease, was allowed to drag. So long as you didn't lift the back foot off the ground. That was modified later, so that any part of the foot had to be behind the crease.

40:30 So there was a lot of changes that took place. At high school, I don't want to blow my trumpet or anything, I liked sport and I used to captain the local cricket side and was in the rugby league side or whatever and played tennis against the other schools. I remember one very competitive fellow from another school his name was Ian Dowth and

41:00 he went to Beaudesert High School at the time and he was a faster runner than I. And so he sort of had it on me in the rugby league and I was six foot four tall and the coach put me at five-eighth. I can't believe it, but probably so I could distribute the ball. But I had to mark this bloke and he was just too quick for me. He was only a little bloke and

41:30 he side stepped me, he scored all of their points- three tries and a goal - I will never forget it, but I did score a try against him. But our side easily defeated their side because we sent the ball out to the wings and the wings scored most of the tries. He was really a one-man team you might say.

42:02 End of tape

Tape 3

00:30 **So before the break we were talking about either high school or teacher what ended up being the deciding factor?**

It was a matter of what I qualified for, I wasn't a terrific student and I didn't study much. I had two jobs offered me, one was in the

- 01:00 Commonwealth Public Service, I could either go to Canberra or Darwin and the other was teacher. I didn't actually try for pilot, by that time I had dispensed of the idea. I did try for meteorologist however and I didn't get that one. But in those days you did have a reasonable chance of getting the jobs you
- 01:30 tried for, providing you had enough behind you. So I knocked the Commonwealth Service back and went to Teachers' College at Kedron Park.

What had been the application procedures for those two?

I think we received application forms through the schools and I

- 02:00 decided to apply for the schools. I was notified of the public service first and then the Teachers College one and so I accepted the Teachers College. Now that meant I was bonded for two years after doing the teacher training. I was paid an allowance to go for teachers' college
- 02:30 for two years. Some others had received an allowance as well so they were bonded for four years. That meant you had to teach for four years. Bonding after senior meant you had to teach for two years if you decided you wanted to do something else. Or you had to pay the department back the money they had paid you.

Was there an interview for either the public service or Teachers' College?

- 03:00 I don't remember being interviewed.

And when both of those offers were on the table did you discuss making the choice with mum and dad?

Yes well it was my choice and that's what I chose to do.

What was their advice?

I can't remember. I think my mother was happy that I was going to be a teacher.

- 03:30 I knew what was on board, I knew I would be bonded for two years. If you didn't want to go through with it that meant you would have to pay them the allowance back that you got during the time you were at college.

What had your older brother go on to do?

- 04:00 My older brother was a share farmer and then as time went on he gave up share farming and got a job on the local council in Boonah. He was a truck driver. He actually passed away about seventeen years ago. Developed a cancer. So he is not around anymore. The younger brother lives at Caloundra.
- 04:30 He became a teacher too and he has since given it up.

So heading off to Teachers' College you obviously had to move to Brisbane?

Yes. It was difficult for me to travel from Boonah to Brisbane so I moved to Brisbane I lived at Nunda, 79 Jenna Street, which is near Oxen Park,

- 05:00 Oxen Park was then home for the local Toombul Cricket team and home for the local Northern Suburbs Rugby League team and I joined both one in the winter and one in the summer. And I wasn't far to the ground, only a hundred metres to the ground, so for training purposes that was ideal. It was right beside the Nunda Railway Station, I had a pass to travel from
- 05:30 Nunda to Willowyn each day when I went to college and we would walk the other seven or eight hundred metres.

And the pass was provided by the government?

It was provided yes. And so I had the rail travel between those two places, it was pretty common to use the pass to go right into Brisbane though and they didn't often look at it.

- 06:00 Today there has been a crackdown on things like that. I stayed with people called Mr and Mrs Roma, they were older people. She looked after us, another bloke stayed with me a fellow called Jack Waters, he spent his time at the house as well and he was in my group actually and we got on well.
- 06:30 I believe he is still a teacher somewhere on the Gold Coast, but he came from Rockhampton.

How did you come to be living at that particular house?

Organised through the college, I rang the college and I wanted private board in Brisbane and the college arranged it and I accepted it. So that was good as far as that goes.

- 07:00 I had a great routine, got to college every day, catch the train, catch it home. In the afternoon I played sport, I practiced twice a week for cricket in the summer months. I also played tennis and football, practiced twice a week for cricket.

07:30 And the tennis I played at college, I played for the college in the grade Brisbane competition and the college had a few teams in, a first team and second team and I was in the first team along with a fellow from my group. It was four and two, so there were two girls and four blokes in a team.

Was teachers' college in those times like a stand alone place or was it part

08:00 **of a university?**

Teachers College at that time was solely for teachers. There was two in Brisbane, the other one was called Kelvin Grove and this one was called Kedron Park Teachers College which later changed to North Brisbane College for Advanced Education or something like that. It was right next door to the Kedron Park High School.

08:30 And we had great expanses of ovals stretching out to the Kedron Brook at the college, lots of tennis courts and a hotel too which we could sneak over to from time to time, on the corner. On Friday afternoons we used to have clubs and whatever. The drinking age was twenty-one in

09:00 those days but some of us looked more than twenty-one and in clubs some of us managed to sneak out and go to the pub. Have a few drinks of a Friday afternoon which was good, until we were caught of course.

You were caught?

Not me, but others were and then it was laid on the line.

What happened if you were caught?

Oh nothing really. We had at the college

09:30 first years and second years, it was two years training. Prior to that it was only one year training and later on it became three years when they had to go to uni and that. But yes, it was two year training and I can remember when I was in first year all of the males

10:00 in the second year were in groups and there were four of those, and there were about seven or eight or nine women's groups. Of course there were a lot more women than men at college at the time. Same thing is today even more so. And when I went to college there were four mixed groups

10:30 and the other groups in my year were female only. So there was about half and half females and males in the mixed groups. I found that I enjoyed college life, it was the best two years of my life. I really

11:00 enjoyed it. I enjoyed the comradeship of the blokes, sporting teams and social life. It was all great and I did actually put my head down and I did alright at college. And in my second year I also did part time night time a university subject, which in those days you had to only do ten subjects to get a degree.

11:30 Three years full time to get a degree, but I was doing it part time so I did one subject in my second year.

At the time when you went into Teachers College, was there different training for primary school and high school teaching?

Yes. There was different training and high school teachers got a little bit more money. But at the conclusion of my training they were short of High School teachers so they

12:00 asked those who had done a subject to transfer over to high school and I chose not to.

What was the subject that you had done?

Just history. "Europe to 1815" they called it. Five of us used to go to uni one night, five of us in a VW [car]. And we would just spend the one night there, We would go in the afternoon and from four thirty to

12:30 five thirty we had a tutorial, we were all in the same tutorial. And then we had dinner out at the uni at the refec and then we would have lectures in a huge lecture theatre, That went on for two hours. Same bloke would do the lecturing for the two hours. It was great. And the guy who owned the VW after a

13:00 period of time he was sick of going to lectures so he said, "Listen you guys take the notes and I will get some of your notes." And he used to play cards in the refec and we all ended up with passes and that rotten so and so ended up with a credit. He probably had the benefit of all our notes I would say.

13:30 He did alright out of it., we did play a trick on him one night, the last night of lectures we ended up finishing early and he didn't know of course, he was still in the refec playing cards. And so we went down to the car park and shifted his car, we actually bodily lifted it and moved it about a hundred metres to another spot. And we all go back to the refec

14:00 and we walked down just talking nonchalantly and so forth. And we get to the car park, and he said, "My car, some rotten so and so had pinched my car!" and before we knew it, he was on the phone contacting the police. But we had to quickly explain that "We think you parked the car somewhere else," and he said, "I could have sworn I parked it over there." And he had to ring the police and explain he made a mistake.

14:30 So we did silly things like that.

Socially, apart from playing sport and sneaking into the pubs, what other sort of things were you doing?

We socialised, well most people socialised. You had some people who didn't. The ones who socialised more were probably

15:00 those who were living in Brisbane who came from the country. The others were living at home and they probably didn't socialise as much as those who came from the country. I do remember every Saturday night they had a party on at one fellow's place. He lived at Kelvin Grove, they were country fellows and about four fellows had this house that they shared and they used to get in a

15:30 keg for the night and it was fifty cents if you arrived before nine o'clock. If you arrived after nine o'clock you didn't bother paying. So it was fine and I would arrive after nine. Because by the time I had finished playing sport and had dinner it was pretty late anyway. So Jack and I used to roll up about nine or a bit after and these parties used to go on until two o'clock in the morning

16:00 and then someone would drive home and he had been at the party too. I do remember the car going one way, most of us were asleep in the car on the way home except for the driver

16:30 and I woke up one night to find we were driving along a footpath somewhere in the Valley, and I don't think he realised it. But we always got home alright, we didn't have a mishap or anything like that. It was great fun, but when you look back it might not have been great fun if something had happened. The parties, great, young ladies and young men.

17:00 On Saturday nights and I daresay there were parties around Friday night too but I went out a little bit on Friday nights but not too much because I used to work a bit on Saturday morning, used to do a bit of gardening and that would get me an extra buck and even went up to Northgate Cannery, when they were in season, and did the morning there for four hours before I went to cricket or whatever.

17:30 Northgate cannery was only just down the road, it was the next suburb.

What was being canned?

Pineapples in season but all sorts of fruit. It is still a big cannery today I think. A lot of the fruit was railed down and the train went straight through the factory.

And what was your job there?

I used to shift crates and things like that, have a vehicle you run the forklift under and run it around the back

18:00 that's about it, shift crates mostly.

Did you have your license [to drive]?

Yes I had my car licence. And but you had to have a licence to operate this forklift and I did some training there with them.

Where had you got your car licence?

I got my car licence when I was about eighteen.

18:30 I didn't get it in my home town of Boonah. I was on holidays out at Charleville, I was out there with a mate and I was out there for the six weeks and his sister was getting married. So they wanted someone to drive the car other than the best man and he was best man and he suggested me and I said, "But I haven't got my licence yet. "and he said, "Well, we will get it here."

19:00 We went around to the police station in Charleville and they asked me why I was getting it there and I said, "They need me to drive the car for the wedding in a few days' time." So they said, "Yeah okay" the usual practice was to get it in your own home town but they said, "We will take you for a spin." So a young fellow probably my age took me for the licence and beforehand my mate

19:30 teed [warned] me up to a few things that they might do. He said, "They nearly always stop at the stop sign on such and such a street, there is a bush growing in front of it but make sure you stop. You won't see it until you're right on it." You had to do angle parking and ordinary parking, that was no problem. Anyway I got in with this guy and we drove around for a while and he said, "Right, stop on the hill."

20:00 And I said, "Where is the hill?" there weren't no hills. And he said, "The railway line." And there is a little embankment up to the railway line, wouldn't have risen more than ten feet and that's where I had to stop and the car barely wouldn't run back, but I had to put the hand brake on, that was the reason for stopping there. And so we went around from there and sure enough

20:30 he took me past the stop sign and I stopped and I got my licence. Little bit different from today I guess when people have to go for it several times after going through a driving school, so that's where I got my licence in good old Charleville. I didn't have a car, I didn't get a car until the last couple of months I

was at college when I put the

21:00 hard word on my parents and my mother lent me some money to get this old FJ[Holden].It was about ten or eleven years old, which I paid back to her within six months. So I bought an old FJ in the last couple of months I was in college and a mate of mine and I fixed it up, we changed the gaskets in the motor and it was fine, it was like new. Except that

21:30 the gear lever used to occasionally jump out of third gear when it was running flat out. And so that was the old FJ that I had for fifteen months until I joined the army.

In that time, when you had a car or were relying on mates with cars did you ever go on day trips, trips away?

Not often. Didn't often go on trips away when I was at college. We used to spend time on the Gold Coast

22:00 **What was the Gold Coast like then?**

Pretty good as I remember. Of course not as populated. It was more user friendly and all of that sort of stuff. We used to stay at Kirra, six of us would get a flat in Haig Street and we would stay there for the six weeks. Those flats are still there today. In fact my

22:30 brother-in-law owns half of Haig Street. So yes I can still remember the name, it was called the Caribbean. There were about six different flats there and we had a great time from there, we mainly walk to wherever we went at Coolangatta or Kirra, Tweed Heads or whatever. Surf mainly.

23:00 Spear shovel nose sharks and sell them to Kev's Diner. We had a local who knew the place, he lived in Coolangatta, and he knew the place well. We used to go out in a boat and the shovel nose, where the Kirra groyne is now but was not then, and it was a sandy area out there and these small shovel noses, no bigger than say that, long like flat head and

23:30 we would spear those and take them into Kev and he would sell them in his Kev's Diner, a fish and chip place. Very popular, in the back of the Main Street in Coolangatta, very popular place. He must have made a fortune out of this fish and chip shop. Other things at college well, I enjoyed the sport the participation everything at

24:00 college. But I have a little tale to tell about lectures. When I was a first year, there used to be one student in each group that used to mark the rolls to get them ready for the teacher you see? And one student would mark the roll each day. That was fine for our group, but group 'M' which happened to be a second

24:30 year group and a male group, they used to have to do the same sort of thing but right from the outset when they started at college they invented a person and they had him on the roll, his name was Merv Simpson. And they marked him on the roll and he existed for fifteen months, the twelve months of the first year and about three months of the second. Merv handed in assignments like

25:00 everybody else and every guy, most of the guys did a little bit of the assignment and so you can imagine what it was like, pretty sloppy I guess because everybody had a share in this assignment. All of the assignments that he did, he was an up to date student and he had everything handed in. No lecturer actually knew him by sight, he must have been one of those average students who didn't stand out at the bottom or at

25:30 the top, but no lecturer knew him by sight. But they all knew about Merv, he was on the roll, they knew the name, he had done these assignments and he was an average student. Anyway one day we were sitting in lectures and we saw all of these guys in suits walking along the veranda and I said, "What's going on here?" and anyway we got on break and said, "What's going on with that group there, they are all in suits?"

26:00 They said, "Didn't you hear one of the students in that group died." Well all exclaimed, "Oh yeah right oh." And they said, "It was Merv Simpson. He died and the deputy principal has given them time off to go to the funeral. " And so they all went over to the other side of town, to the Regatta Hotel and spent the day there and college got to

26:30 hear about it. Well the first thing that was done, Huey Courtney was the deputy principal at the time and he was the man who was the 'Mister Rugby Union' at the college and half of these blokes were rugby union players. So he didn't dare do anything but he was very stropky with these blokes. And the principal made a decree

27:00 not to let any of this out., the newspaper was not to get a hold of any of this and it was kept very hush hush and nobody was wrapped over the knuckles or anything for it. So they got away with it, a beauty.

Wonder why they would create a fictional student?

Well I think that was the reason they did it, so they could have a day off at a later time. And it just goes to show you that the lecturers at the time didn't know who was in their groups.

27:30 And it goes to show also that the marking system could have been a bit artificial, but we won't say any

more about it.

Very ingenious, a lot of leg work for a day off though isn't it?

Well it really didn't cost them too much. I don't think but they had a great day and they will never forget that day.

So at what point

28:00 **during all of this did Vietnam start raising its head?**

Well yes, Vietnam had already started when I went to college. I went to college in 1966, 1967 but we already had troops in Vietnam in 1965 but we had advisors over there in 1964

28:30 and there may have even been somebody over there prior to the advisors in 1964. The advisors were with the Americans but they were training ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] troops I imagine, probably some of them were SAS [Special Air Service] or whatever, some of these advisors I mean. Most of the advisors would have taken their instructions from the American

29:00 people who were in charge at the time. But I think the first battalion, or one of the battalions, when I say first battalion I am not talking about 1 RAR [1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment] I think the first of the battalions to go was in 1965 and I turned twenty towards the end of my first year at college and that's when I was called up, I was called up towards the

29:30 end of my first year. But I didn't go. I was allowed a deferment to finish my college and also to actually teach one year. I imagine there was some sort of arrangement between the state government and the federal government over people who were bonded like that. The state

30:00 government wanted their little bit of repayment. So those people who were called up at college were allowed to complete the college and do one year with the Queensland government before the Commonwealth government took them for military. So I had a two year deferment and I thought, "Oh great it will be all over by then, there won't be any problems and I would miss out, good."

30:30 I didn't really want to go into the military and nor did anyone else, as far as I know. There might have been the odd one who was that way inclined but most didn't want to go in. There were approximately three birthdays a month which were selected,

31:00 I always thought so your chance of being selected was one in ten, but it was one in twelve of twenty year olds chosen to do national service. Now I have been looking at statistics lately: of those one in twelve, which amounted to something like seven hundred and sixty thousand, were actually over the periods of the war were called up.

31:30 But only sixty thousand actually served in Vietnam. So of those seven hundred and sixty thousand who were called up over the period, only sixty thousand went to Vietnam, and that was over the term of 1966 to the

32:00 end of 1972. Of that sixty thousand, most were in the army, some were in the air force or navy, not many. So I daresay there were a few thousand who would have been in the air force and navy, they would have had to specify that choice I would think.

32:30 But the others were in the army and yes at the end of 1965, I was called up. Want to hear more about college or not?

When you got that

33:00 **first call up notice, how difficult was it to get that deferment?**

Not difficult at all because I didn't really have any say in it, the Queensland Government wanted me to finish.

So you didn't have to apply?

I may have had to apply, I can't remember, but there was no problem in getting the deferment. Lots of people were deferred for one reason or another. Like lots of university students were deferred

33:30 for some reason, some people doing apprenticeships might have been deferred, those sorts of things.

Was there any other way you could get out of going?

Conscientious objector. And about four or five people might have been successful. You may know of the real test case a fellow in Sydney, there was a real test case about this fellow being a conscientious

34:00 objector, I can't remember his name or whatever, and he I think he may have been a school teacher too. And he was in a way ostracised but he took it to court. I have got a book over there with all of the details of it.

Did you ever think of trying to find a medical reason not to go?

- 34:30 Oh well people got out of it for medical reason, but you had to have a medical reason to get out. And in my home town the local medical officer did the medical and that would have been in all home towns apparently. And there was a little bit of skulduggery [trickery] involved there when throughout
- 35:00 country people could either by graft or whatever get out of going because they would have something put on their medical certificates that would prevent them from going. And I think I might have had something organised for me too, but I won't go into that. I was
- 35:30 really believing that I wouldn't be going. But then after about the ninth intake they decided to change the system and you had to be examined by a government medical officer at the nearest large city. And so for my medical examination I had to come down to Ipswich and be examined at the telephone exchange, the big building that is in east street there
- 36:00 by a government medical officer. Well that didn't go to well. I told him that I had various things wrong with me and so on and in the end I noticed him write A1 on the medical description. And I thought that's either really rotten and I won't be going, or it is the other way around. And it was the other way around. So
- 36:30 I didn't get out of it.
- When you talk about your local doctor in your home town, had your parents spoken to him?**
- Well mother might have, she used to get a bit ill and she might have whispered a few words. No real assurances were made but I felt confident that's all. I know for a fact
- 37:00 that one other fellow used to play in the local rugby league football team as a forward and he got out for high blood pressure. That was a good one, he might have had high blood pressure but I don't know what he was playing rugby league for if he did.
- Once you got the deferment and you were continuing with college, were you concerned with what was going on, or you thought it would**
- 37:30 **all be over?**
- I probably had some concerns but I really did think that two years was a long way away. College didn't bother me at all but probably in my first year of teaching which was up in Boonah, I might have been thinking a bit towards the end of it. And nobody had ever written to me in that time, I thought maybe they have forgotten about me. I just went on with life
- 38:00 as usual, it didn't bother me unduly.
- Were many of your mates from college on deferments?**
- Yes any of them that were called up, but I was a little older than most. I was probably a year older than most. I remember my birthday period another bloke shared that birthday in my joint group, C and D at college and he was called up the following year as well and so he would have been deferred as
- 38:30 well. There were a number of other blokes called up that I know of. And actually some went to Singleton when I went to Singleton. Most of the teachers went into the first draft of the year, it was either third eleventh or seventh or something. There is four intakes in a year
- 39:00 and so in my intake, which was the first intake of 1968, all of the teachers from Queensland, well nearly all of the teachers would have been in that draft. So few teachers would have been in the second third or fourth drafts, because it interfered with the teaching structure at school. If a teacher sat on a class then that class would be disrupted and so forth, so they tried to get most of the teachers into the first draft.
- 39:30 And I think university students may have been the same. There were a number of university students in my draft down at Singleton I do recall.
- Did you notice any other professions like that that were all drafted together?**
- I am not saying they were all drafted together but most were.
- 40:00 Apprentices might not have started at the beginning of the year or it might not have affected so much ,where as a teacher would need most teachers would have to be assigned at the beginning of the year and they would probably work on something like that.
- 40:30 So I just went on with college life.
- 40:36 End of tape

00:30 **So you got your deferment, but life continues?**

Yes, life continues as usual. After college I went to my home town of Boonah which was called home town service, now that was distinct from country service. Home town service meant that you just went to your home town. Now those people who first went to college in those days

01:00 usually went to their home town for a year anyway to get into the ropes of things. So I did nominate to go to my home town and got there, it didn't always occur. But I boarded at my parents' place and so I had a car then, the old FJ and in those days it was long pants, like

01:30 dark colour, white shirts, long sleeves usually and tie to go to school, work. That was in 1967. So that's the attire that males wore, tie was usually a thin tie, it was the fashion, thin tie. And I had a number of experiences in my first year.

02:00 But the head teacher I considered a fairly strict sort of fellow, but it was a good learning curve I suppose because I think he wanted to make you a good teacher but he used to be onto the fellow getting trained a fair bit, I used to take him with a grain of salt. He never used to associate with the general staff either, he would sit in his office at lunch breaks

02:30 but he would never associate with other teachers, occasionally after school he would have a yarn with the senior male who was there, only one other male at the school, who was related to me. He was much older and the others were all women, mainly married women who had children or whatever and they were back teaching.

03:00 And I started off with a grade five at Boonah, a great class as I remember. And I actually remember that class better than some of the others because it was my first. And they were the locals around there, and in those days the head teacher would do a work book for every class level and it was your duty every six weeks to copy his workbook into your

03:30 workbook and that's what you taught. You had to teach all of that material in your workbook. It was not like today where you have a wide range of things to chose and do it the way you want to. You more or less had to do it the way he wanted it done. And so you couldn't take the workbook home with you and you had to do it at school after hours. But you had to return the workbook to his office

04:00 every time you had it, it wasn't allowed to stay out overnight. And I just forgot about it one day and just left it on the table and I soon got a short shrift about that the next day and told me in no uncertain terms. And another thing he said, "You didn't sign the EOG." Which was the education office gazette which was just left with a piece of string through it near the sign on area with the books.

04:30 And so I thought, "Gee, he is picking on me", but I found out it was the usual thing done with first years. I had an enjoyable class. And during that time you got inspected during your first year. You had to teach another class during the inspection, take another class for a week at one stage

05:00 and you had to teach a lesson to the other class for the inspector. I taught a science lesson for a grade seven. I remember that clearly and it was an hour long lesson so it went for a fair while and the kids were fairly well absorbed in it and I knew I had them and it was great, and I happened to look up and he is sitting at the back of the room and I happened to look up and

05:30 the bugger was sound asleep. So the inspectors in those days had a good time to I think. He might have had a late night. He wasn't a young fellow, he was pretty old.

Were the other teachers there aware of the boat you were in?

Oh yeah.

Was there ever any comments about that?

There probably were, but I can't remember much about it.

And were you watching

06:00 **what was going on closely as far as the war was going on?**

I probably took an interest in it and read the papers. But apart from that I wasn't overly involved in it. I did go along to certain things, like I had the opportunity to go to the Domain in Sydney where they used to have public speaking of a Sunday, they used to have public speaking of a Sunday in Brisbane as well, it

06:30 was in Centenary Park. And there used to be a lot, anyone who wanted to speak publicly, they might have had to get a permit I don't know, but they could say their bit. In the Domain of Sydney or in Centenary Park in Brisbane and I guess the other capital cities had something similar. So I did go to those at Centenary Park a couple of times and I was in the Domain once, but I do remember the communists being well represented

07:00 in those freedom of speech things in the parks, and they were good speakers, they always put up good speakers. And there was a Communist Party in those times too, which always pulled in some votes.

And what was their take on the war in Vietnam?

Well I can't remember what their take was, but I do know that they were spruiking about the benefits of

07:30 communism and all that stuff as opposed to democracy. Because crowds used to howl down, but these guys were so good at speaking they could handle crowds. And yeah I remember that as an interesting part to go to the Domain. And we went a number of times to Centenary Park especially when I was in college, not so much when I was first year out because I had to get down there.

08:00 But at college I probably went to Centenary Park a number of times and listened to the spruik,[talk] nothing like the scale that they did in Sydney though. In Sydney at that time, when I was there, there was no real anti-Vietnam spruiking in the park.

08:30 Some people may have spruiked a little but it was not noticeable, and I would have gone anti-Vietnam there, it was only 1964 that I was in the Domain. Again in Centenary Park there was no real anti-Vietnam stuff in 65 and maybe 66 when I was there.

09:00 Only on a minor scale.

What about first year teaching at Boonah, what was the vibe [feeling] as far as the war was concerned?

Well the vibe in Boonah, nobody wanted to go into the national service. What they needed to do at that time was increase the forces, I believe the Australian active force the army at the time was about twelve thousand and they needed to increase it to twenty-two or twenty-four thousand.

09:30 That's why the call up was on. And even then it didn't commit a lot of troops to Vietnam, twenty-four thousand troops, they enlarged the number of battalions, I can't remember how many battalions the regular army had at the time but it was increased to nine battalions, You look at the infantry and there is probably about six or seven hundred in a battalion plus minor units

10:00 and that sort of stuff. They only sent three battalions over at once at the peak of the war, initially only one battalion was sent to Vietnam in 1965. That was increased to two and by the time I got there it was increased to three, might have been increased to three in late 67 early 68 before the Tet Offensive or after the Tet Offensive, one of the two.

10:30 And there continued to be three battalions all through 1969 and they may have reduced the number to two in 71 or something like that. But the Boonah people, I just can't remember too much about that. I just enjoyed myself in first year teaching. I enjoyed my social life. I used to play cards

11:00 I played sport on weekends, cards one night a week with the local young fellows about my age.

Basically at that stage everything was sweet.

For money, everything was sweet and I enjoyed myself.

So when did the bubble burst?

The real test came towards the end of the year I got a transfer,

11:30 I thought I am home and hosed. I got a transfer and the transfer was to Normanton and I thought, "Well I am going to Normanton for the next year or two".

That would have been country service?

That would have been country service, yeah, Normanton is up in the gulf. It would have been country service. But about a week later I got all of the paraphernalia from the military saying that I was going in

12:00 on the 6th of February. Into the military to report for duty, and I had to go to Enoggera army base and so I had to cancel the transfer to Normanton.

How did you do that?

Well notify the department that I had now been called into the army and I had to report for service. One thing I kept going was my

12:30 superannuation. I still paid into that while I was in the army, I also remember that my departing salary as a teacher in 1967 was ninety-eight dollars a fortnight. So that's not very much is it? It was still regarded as a good

13:00 pay for a person. Most people didn't earn anything like that, they earned seventy or less. And I went into the army and I dropped pay.

Can I just ask you that day you got notification from the army, they have given you a date what did you think?

I can't remember. I thought "Shit, I have got to go into the army subject to a medical" which I had in Ipswich. So I couldn't get that medical by my own doctor, I had to have it in Ipswich

13:30 with a government medical officer and he passed everything. I remember meeting a fellow there, his name was McGeekie and I have run into him a fair bit since. I have lost contact now but he was at that medical and we compared notes. He said, "I have got a lot of things wrong with me." But there was nothing wrong with him, he was like a mallee bull too. And he said, "I have got a lot of things wrong with me." And I said, "Well what did he put beside your name?" and he said, "A1." And I said, "I got that too,

14:00 we both might be lucky."

So what was going to be the situation a far as your army pay was concerned?

Well my army pay as a recruit was going to be seventy-three dollars a fortnight and I thought, coming down from ninety-eight to seventy-three, that's a quarter of my pay I

14:30 am dipping out on. But the thing is, I was probably as well off in the army with seventy-three as I was with ninety-eight because I didn't have to pay board, in those days the servicemen didn't pay anything for board and lodging if they weren't married. You didn't pay anything for civilian clothes because you didn't have any in recruit corps training, you weren't even allowed out

15:00 in recruit training. So you didn't need any. All you had was the stuff they gave you and you didn't have to pay for the stuff you wore in training. So you were issued with all of these things, long johns for sleeping for the winter.

15:30 **In between getting your letter, you had to go to Ipswich to get checked out and then what happens from there?**

Well they give us instructions about where to go and when to go, whatever.

And what to take?

Yeah.

Which was what?

I can't remember, we did take some civilian clothes with us.

And where did you have to report to on the 6th of Feb?

16:00 Report to Enoggera, so I did that.

Was there any sort of going away or anything at home?

No I didn't bother. And I can remember reporting on the 6th of February, I can't remember whether we were taken down by vehicle from Ipswich or I just reported to Enoggera, I can't remember that, but I imagine it could have been a vehicle from Ipswich. We arrived at Enoggera and I pulled up with this

16:30 McGeekie and they said, "Right, you have got the afternoon off, you can go into town. Tomorrow we go to Singleton." "Okay." I have never done cadets or anything like that. And McGeekie is in the same boat. And McGeekie and I start walking, we are saying, "Alright we will go in and go to the pictures or something like that in town." We start strolling off and we stroll over this area of bitumen and it has got curbing and I thought at the time that's a strange place, there are no cars on this.

17:00 It has got curbing all around it, how do they get on it? Anyway we were about half way across and we both froze and this guy from the side was yelling and we thought what the hell is he yelling at? And he was yelling at us. This happened to be a sergeant. And he yells, "Get your slack arses over here." So we're dressed in civilian clothes and we wander over, slouch over I should

17:30 say, "Stand up straight!" and that sort of thing. And he says, "I am going to take you up before the major right now." And we said, well we didn't even know what a major was and more or less, "Who are you?" Anyway he has taken us up to the major and I knew that they were having a go at us but we just

18:00 had to keep it cool and not just 'two four six eight and jump in'. McGeekie was a bit more highly-strung than me and he was almost ready to pop, so I said, "Calm down." So we go in before the major and the major is very calm and collected, he has got a smile on his face and the sergeant has still got a straight face. And he is giving

18:30 him a report, a verbal one not a written one. He says, "These two fellows were strolling across the parade ground." And the major says, "Oh were they?" with a bit of a smile on his face. So we told our story, we said, "We walked across that car park there." And the sergeant says, "Do not call it a car park." I can still remember this.

19:00 And he said something about practicing on the car park and McGeekie says, "Practice what sir?" So the major then says, "Well listen fellows, it's your first day, have you been in the cadets?" to me and I say, "No I wouldn't even know what a cadet looks like." And he says, "Right oh,

19:30 it is your first day, you don't walk on things like that, that's called a parade ground and you will get used to it as from tomorrow. Well I will let you off this time, we usually charge people for that." and

McGeekie says, "What do you mean charge them?" And he says, "Well we have got our own military police and you will probably end up with seven days in CB [confined to barracks] down at Singleton [army base]," and he says, "What's CB?"

20:00 "Oh you have got to drill for twenty-five hours a day." Something like that. So we learnt what a parade ground was very quickly. That was our first lesson. So we ended up going to Singleton, do you want to go that way?

Yeah so what time did you end up leaving the next morning?

Oh early. It would have been all day trip.

How did they get you down there?

20:30 Might have been a military bus. We arrived at Singleton where we were all like sheep you know, "Do this, do that, stand this line, take this injection." All of that sort of stuff. "Take these clothes, whether they fit or not." I was issued

21:00 with all sorts of stuff. I remember they gave me a long sleeved pullover, brown one military thing and the bloody thing only came down to about here, but that was the biggest one they had. So we were issued with mainly greens at that stage but later on we were issued with civilian

21:30 summer dress and later on we were issued with battle dress. Winter dress for going out. And with the summer dress had a little old tie and polyester tie and sleeves down to about here and they were too short as well. So we got issued with those things,

22:00 with boots, they were sort of marching boots, they weren't the GPs that you had later on, everybody was looking forward to getting GPs because these were actually boots that came up about this high and these were the ones that you had to spit polish and you had I can't remember the name for them

Gaiters?

Yeah, I call them gaiters but they had a different name, I can't remember what they were called.

What were they made of?

Just

22:30 leather or a plastic type material. Like shoes, and they strapped on to cover your socks, all military personnel on parades wore then anyway. If you were in the services you probably would have worn them yourself. Yeah they had a special name for them.

23:00 Just about everything there, dog tags [identification] you name it. So you got your dog tags, you might not have got your dog tags in recruit training but I think you got your number straight away. One seven three four oh five seven.

23:30 **What about a hair cut?**

Yeah hair cuts , most of them got their wool shorn straight away. That was all done and then we were assigned to training platoons. I can't remember what platoon I was in for recruit training. No that was corps training.

That was Singo too wasn't it?

Infantry was at Singleton. It might have been

24:00 14 platoon for recruits, I don't know I can't remember.

How were the blokes handling all of this yelling?

See we arrived down there with blokes from all over Australia really. There were two companies of training people, it was called the 3rd Training Battalion but

24:30 there was A Company and B Company. I was in B Company and most of the Queenslanders were in B Company along with other people from other states. A Company didn't have too many Queenslanders in it. I think most of them were from the west or something like that. I think little Dave might have been in A Company I am not sure. Anyway

25:00 for the first month you weren't allowed any access to the booze or anything .All you did was train, eat meals, go to sleep, train, eat meals and go to sleep. You weren't allowed to the boozer [bar], none of that time was yours for the first month. I am not sure we might have got a bit of time off at the end of the first month, I am

25:30 not sure. First day, okay what to do at these things? He takes us up to the ablution block, this is the sergeant and he says, "Right oh you guys, this is my platoon", he says, "I am going to show you how to iron clothes." This is a rough burly sergeant and he has got the iron out and he says, "First of all starch them",

- 26:00 and he is ironing them dry and it is better than a dry cleaners. All seams have to show. Seams down here at the front and they were spotless and not a mark on it, and he showed us how to do all of that and how to put it over the end of the ironing board and all of that.
- 26:30 He showed us some other things too about personal care in the army and he did warn us that anyone who steps out of line they will be cleaning these blocks while they were doing CB. And he said, "We have special equipment for the purpose." And it happened to be used toothbrushes.
- 27:00 So anyway so we didn't really want CB. And parade, well it was all yelling out and drilling for the first month. A lot of drill. And so I can remember us drilling one afternoon with him, the sergeant, there were corporals with us too but the sergeant was the main drill fellow in the platoon.
- 27:30 And I can remember him drilling us one afternoon and we were told never to use the tap beside the orderly room. The building which we had lectures in, because there was a mess there, there was a quagmire, a tap and a grassy area around it .and he said, "No one will ever use that tap." And so no one did.
- 28:00 But we were drilling and we were facing the tap, and he has got his back to the tap, and we are about a hundred yards away and we're on this parade ground drilling. And then this guy from A Company is heading up towards A Company. He has been on some sort of strenuous exercise somewhere and he is headed to the tap and he scoops his hand underneath
- 28:30 and he is drinking form this tap. And the sergeant could see our eyes going there, we didn't move our heads, but he could see our eyes and he says, "Stand at attention!" and he has done a right wheel and put his foot down, "Soldier!" he yells out at the top of his voice, "Soldier! Get your backside over here so that I can kick your arse!
- 29:00 I will make sure your nose bleeds." Anyway he has come over and he has gone right through him and he says, "I was just having a drink." And he says, "Get into that drill line." And he grabbed this fellow and he stuck him into the platoon right at the front and he has drilled us for another hour. See you want to be competitive with other platoons and
- 29:30 especially other companies and he has drilled us for another hour and he has really given us a hell of a drilling nothing like we have ever had before; and he has picked on this bloke the whole time and he has gone away with his tail tucked between his legs and probably told all over the other blokes, "Never ever go near B Company orderly room this is what will happen to you."
- 30:00 **What did you think of drill?**
- Look when I went down there I knew what I was going down there for. I knew what we were going to do and I thought, "Look I am in the army, I will keep my nose clean and do the right thing and I won't make it hard for myself". And a lot of people did that. But some didn't, and they made it hard for themselves alright. But if you had the right attitude you went there to do the right thing,
- 30:30 do your time get out and that's it, and things would probably go your way.
- What things stand out for you about basic training?**
- Well drill and perhaps keep them going all day. We started off with a run in the morning about four miles, five o'clock, summer or winter didn't matter, frost on the grass didn't matter.
- 31:00 Always singlet and baggy little shorts and black sand shoes with soles about that thick and army green socks. That was it. And you would do your jog in the morning for about four mile and it was in platoon formation. If I was down near the end that was a
- 31:30 bit of a struggle but I was always right marker, I was the tallest bloke in the platoon sort of thing. And that was easy for me and in the morning. I would try to get in the front three because for a bloke as tall as I am if a short bloke gets to the front he is taking a shorter step and it is very difficult for a tall bloke to take short steps for four Ks [kilometres] without
- 32:00 getting tired hips. So I would be at the front and I would make the step and then they would just take a longer step. It is easier for someone shorter to take a longer step than for someone taller to take a shorter step and keep it up. So that's the reason why they have right markers who are tall anyway.
- How did the Queenslanders cope with the cold?**
- Well they managed.
- 32:30 The recruit training was over by Easter and then we went different ways. We were given a choice. We were asked to write down three choices determining where we would go, what corps. And I wrote down ordinance, education and transport.
- 33:00 Very few would write down infantry. It so turned out that about half of them down there got infantry because here is the politics of this national service, this is from my point of view. People they
- 33:30 were getting into the army were volunteer soldiers, they wanted to make that their career. But there

were other places in civilian street where most of those people were probably, and let's put it this way, those people who went into the military many of them probably couldn't find a suitable job that they wanted outside, and found

- 34:00 the military was paying them as well as anything they would get outside. And so the military probably attracted average type mentality and below average type. This is the ordinary ranks I am talking about, not the officers, because they would be the ones who would be really making a career out of it. And so they could be fit, yeah they could be. But then
- 34:30 it seems to me that they were after people who were more intelligent so that they could be sent to and have a more responsible role overseas. And I think they were looking for a lot of those. And would you believe that
- 35:00 most of the university students and teachers were put into infantry. I found after recruit training a lot of those blokes went to infantry and my corps training platoon was almost half school teachers. Of course a lot of school teachers went into that intake,
- 35:30 but they weren't half school teachers in recruit training. Nothing like it in the platoon. And they were looking for blokes who were probably fitter, sportsmen people. Now I know I played a lot of sport and before our corps were chosen we had to do a test.
- 36:00 It was like an obstacle type test. You had to run a mile in a certain time, it was a liberal time, six minutes and fifteen seconds I remember that, you had to run a mile in six minutes and fifteen seconds and you had to do about ten different types of exercises, you had to do the chin ups where you had to jump up to the bar, not with hands like that but with hands like that so
- 36:30 your hands were on the bar that way, it is easier to do them that way. So you jumped up to the bar and your chin actually had to go over the bar and you had to do ten of those. I found that the hardest thing to do. I was a big bloke and quite weighty, where as you found the fellows who were nine stone would just go "choow, choow, chow!". Very difficult for me to do ten. And various
- 37:00 other things. I found the others quite easy to do. Push-ups were a bit harder for me, again the bulk. And I hadn't been doing weight or anything so my arms weren't built up that much. I know I played football but I didn't play that much football. So they were probably the two hardest exercises for me, the push-ups and especially the chin ups.
- 37:30 The others were pretty simple. You had to do things like going across a rope, underneath a rope twenty foot up and they had a net if anyone fell off, but as you go across one leg goes over the thing, you probably did this sort of thing? You pulled yourself across underneath the rope. And I remember one bloke,
- 38:00 he got onto this rope, he has gone out about that far and he says, "Can't do it." and the phys ed [physical education] bloke is yelling at him, "You can do it!" Ed was his name, "You can do it!" And he says, "No I can't go any further." And he says, he is getting right up him starting to curse him and whatever and
- 38:30 Ed says, "I don't care what you say, that's it, I can't do it" and down he comes into the net. And the rope would be the three quarters of the length of the house, twenty foot above that you had to go over but the net was quite safe to go into. Anyway all of those that couldn't do these exercises had to report to the gym for the next week and all
- 39:00 sorts of extra training and so on, and they had to do it again and whatever. It was a real hassle to do those things over and over again. If you did it the first time great. Little did we know that the ones who did it the first time were the ones who went to infantry.

What were the instructors like?

- 39:30 If you could see through them they were fine, they even liked to have a joke. But most of the time they were serious, well it is all an act you know. Doesn't matter if you're a school teacher, you put on an act, if you're an army instructor you put on an act too, but some of them took their act a bit too seriously. And some would want to push you just a little bit too much.
- 40:00 But if you did regular training at a rugby league club, or I imagine a soccer club, the training is actually more difficult than the training you would do at Singleton. Much more difficult, but not as lasting. You're doing it all of the time, it is to cater for probably the average.
- 40:30 But it goes one and one all of the time. If you're doing rugby league training they push you harder than that.
- 40:53 End of tape

00:30 **So in any of that stage at basic or corps training how was the mateship that we hear so much about, how was that starting to?**

Oh great I developed a bit of a mateship straight away with people and when we were allowed to go down to the boozier after the first month,

01:00 only on limited occasions, you get more mateship then and have a yarn over things and it was like a football team, you develop the same sort of mateship.

We hear stories about one fellow steps out of line everybody

01:30 **gets punished?**

That wasn't true. There might have been a few occasions where if they couldn't locate the trouble maker, well everybody suffered. But that wasn't true for us. I think they might have been slightly more liberal with the nashos [national servicemen] coming in there too, you never know.

02:00 **Were there any nashos that obviously weren't of the same opinion?**

Yeah they were agin things and probably ended up on CB or something like that. But you could get CB for anything, you didn't even have to be trying to get it.

How did you find the NCOs?

Pretty good actually, they were pretty fair.

02:30 **Was discipline a shock to any of the fellows?**

It would have been to some but it wasn't to me, I expected something like that or even worse. You could imagine you wanted an instant response in the military, so it wasn't something that I wasn't expecting. And

03:00 I just kept again with that idea of keeping my nose clean and I will be right.

Were there any blokes that didn't cope so well with the training?

Yes there were some. I wouldn't say a lot but there were some, and some I think the NCOs [non-commissioned officers] might have wanted some out because they might have thought that they weren't up to a

03:30 required standard or something. I know that one fellow in our year didn't sort of make it there he was discharged, but no fault of his own I don't think, he just wasn't sort of able to.

If fellows were having troubles, would anyone try and help them out?

04:00 Not really. They may have but I didn't seem to notice anything like that.

So corps training and basic were both at Singleton, were they?

Basic recruit training was at Singleton for everybody and at Kapooka but those who went to Singleton didn't go to Kapooka. Then corps training for infantry was at Singleton, those who

04:30 went to other corps went elsewhere. Could be Holsworthy in Sydney, could be anywhere wherever they had the training for that corps.

Did you have leave between?

Yes we had four days leave I think. Between recruit and corps training.

And what did you do?

I came back here, I got a lift with a couple of blokes.

05:00 I sold my car before I went into the army and I wasn't needing at any more and I didn't think I would take it with me anyway so I sold it and I probably hitchhiked a fair bit down there, or just bummed a lift with those that had cars. And we did have some free time on weekends, Saturday nights or something

05:30 and most of us would go to Maitland from Singleton. Just to go to the Leagues Club or the RSL [Returned and Services League], which doesn't exist now, they don't have that RSL, I think it might have burnt down some years ago. But I found the RSL good to go to. A certain night they held a dance there and you got to meet a few of the ladies and the Leagues' Club

06:00 was also a good place to go to.

And when you came back to see your family, how were they feeling about you being in the army?

I don't remember actually. I know I went back to Boonah for four days but I had an action packed four days from what I can remember. I can't remember exactly what I did. I know I went to the races one

day, Stradbroke was on and I went to it with the local publican from Dugandan.

06:30 About five of us went down with him. And I went to the Golf Ball that night that was a rather interesting place to go, after he had shut up shop at the hotel. So no, I can't remember, probably just cooled it a bit with some of my

07:00 mates that I knew.

So heading back to corps training, how different were you expecting it to be?

I didn't expect it to be much different and it wasn't much different from recruit training, it was a little bit more lax than recruit training, wasn't as intense. But we still did all of the things we had to do for the infantry side of things. Really just

07:30 bivouacs [camps] and firing guns and that sort of training. We did a nine-day exercise towards the end of corps training in the Kindrin Mountains which was on the Old Putty Road, down to Sydney. It actually snowed there while we were doing that exercise. That was cold.

08:00 We had to dig into almost rocky type hillside and make our overhead cover and so forth and play war games and be on picket [sentry duty] half of the night and so forth while the other fellow slept. Two of us in one of these ground cover things. And all we had was an army sleeping bag

08:30 and the old jumper. I can remember I tied an extra sleeping bag a civilian one inside my army sleeping bag. I still froze. It snowed all right.

Was that the first time you had seen snow?

It was in fact.

At what point during the training did you first get to handle weapons?

We handled weapons all through the training, pulling them apart and putting them

09:00 together and so forth. We used ammo, mock sort of ammunition.. We used blanks. We had blanks in the guns. but a blank on discharge would tear paper apart

09:30 so you didn't put it up near someone face or ear or something like that. It made the same sort of noise.

Was there any live ammo firing during corps training?

Oh yes and recruit training. Recruit training and corps training. In recruit training you had mainly the closer range twenty-five metre [target] something like that to get [bullet] grouping. But in

10:00 corps training it was more extensive and you had to fire over a certain range and we had a bivouac out at Greta where it was all firing for a few days, machine guns and firing at targets long ranges, up to three or six hundred metres. At a rifle range.

Which weapons were you trained in?

10:30 SLR, that's self-loading rifle, the M60 machine gun, F1 which is a short barrelled gun with the magazine coming out of the top. Firing a thicker round [bullet] but shorter. In my opinion they weren't

11:00 very effective, I reckon they would be flat out knocking something at thirty metres.

Did you have a preference for any of the weapons?

I liked firing them all actually. There was the Armalite [rifle] as well. But I don't remember us going too much training on the Armalite, we had the Armalite in the battalion. But I liked the SLR because it had a long barrel, it replaced the 303 from

11:30 the Second World War. And it was a repeater rifle, self-loading. And fired twenty round magazine 7.62 millimetre similar to the 303. I liked it, and the M 60 machine gun also took the same round, but you had a linked belt for that and there was a hundred rounds in the link, where as

12:00 the magazine for the SLR had a twenty round magazine. And the soldier in an infantry battalion carried six of those magazines with one in the rifle. Maybe a hundred and twenty rounds. A machine gunner usually carried one link belt in his gun, two or three link belts over his back and his machine gun second [partner] carried another three link belts. Machine

12:30 gunners second job, he had an SLR and he carried the extra ammunition and he also carried a spare barrel for the machine gun. And an asbestos glove. When the barrel was white hot he would take the barrel off it with the asbestos glove by hand, and put the spare barrel on. And it would get white hot after

13:00 around about three hundred rounds were fired continuously through it.

When you were out on exercises or bivouacs did you had a particular position you favoured in

terms of machine gun or rifle?

No I didn't have a position that I favoured, they took you in sections out for these practice runs. That's ten men.

- 13:30 And not all of them had carried the machine gun in corps training. We were just in sections; we probably all carried a rifle or whatever and had specific training with machine gun. When you went to battalion you were zeroed into carrying particular weapons. Because in the battalion it is organised in such a manner that you have got companies and there is about a hundred and
- 14:00 thirty men in a company and you have got four platoons in a company and there is supposed to be thirty three men in a full strength company, three sections of ten. But the other extras to make up the thirty-three would be a medic, the officer, and the sergeant. So you have got an officer in charge of the
- 14:30 platoon - would have the rank of lieutenant or second lieutenant - and a sergeant is usually the NCO in charge of the platoon. I regarded the non commissioned officers the real soldiers and the officers as just those who gave the instructions, but the sergeant carried them out. And then in charge
- 15:00 of each section you had a corporal. That was my job in Vietnam. I was a corporal and there were ten men in the platoon. Do you want to hear all of this stuff? Ten men in the platoon, two men were lead scouts up the front and then followed the section commander and then following him was the
- 15:30 sig [signaller] that carried a twenty-five set or a radio. Another name for a radio, we had what they called twenty-five sets in those days which had a telephone receiver. You just spoke into the receiver and put your aerial up. Powered by batteries and he carried that in addition to his pack which weighed twenty, twenty-five pound in addition to his normal pack.
- 16:00 He carried an Armalite, two scouts carried Armalites as well and so did the section commander. That's the corporal carried an Armalite, the machine gunner he was fifth in line and of course carried a machine gun. The machine gunner, second, carried an SLR. Following the machine gun second you had the 2IC who was a lance corporal.
- 16:30 I am not sure whether he carried an SLR or what. And then there were three riflemen up the back, they carried SLRs and last bloke was called 'tail end Charlie' so he covered the whole of the back. And usually you alternated how you carried your weapons. When on patrol some carried weapons like so, facing the left, and others carried
- 17:00 it like so, facing right, alternate them more or less down the section just to cover both sides. And the corporal usually carried a claymore mine, which we set up at night time. We were in platoon positions usually, how we patrolled the jungle was usually in platoon
- 17:30 formation, so that we had three sections and we had three guns pointing out; and where ever there was a gun there was a picket done on that, and the section was responsible for the picket for the night. Two blokes on the gun all of the time, so they spent two hours on and four hours off, they don't change at the same time, they change alternately on the hour. So no one is away, the gun is
- 18:00 not left alone. And the claymore is set up outside the gun position, about thirty metres outside the gun position on perhaps a track if there is one there. And it had prongs you put it in it, had got an arc of sixty degrees. It is filled with bearings in the front and explosives in the back of it. And it has got a lead going back to the machine gun and you just push a switch and away she goes,
- 18:30 takes out everything in front of her. In an arc of sixty degrees.

I will go back to corps training for a second, so apart from all of the exercises you were doing, did you have other duties?

Every so often your platoon was on mess duties and you did that for the day. Now that was shared amongst everybody in the company ,

- 19:00 there might have been a number of platoons on duty in the company but in corps training I only did one mess duty, the first one which I was almost charged .

Why were you almost charged?

Why? Well I gave some lip [cheek] to the duty corporal who was probably a young fellow no older than we were.

- 19:30 After the midday meal there was a few buns left over and we were throwing a few buns around with cream and everything in them and they collected a few and he joined in. But after that we had to clean the place up of course and it was done spiffy, it came night time, when you do the mess hall you clean it up first and then you spit
- 20:00 polish it. You know the story you take the polish, you polish over it; and myself and this other fellow really stuck into this because I wanted to go out this night and we had it looking like a new pin. And for some reason he didn't want to let us go just yet, the dixies weren't quite finished. The seven blokes on the hall had finished and I said to

- 20:30 him, with this other bloke who had helped me did a good job with me, he was a farmer from the Daintree. Hardly ever said a word and a quiet sort of a fellow, wasn't inclined to speak. Anyway I said to this corporal, "Can we go now?" and he said, "Have you done the hall?" and I said, "Yep, like a new pin." And he didn't even look at it
- 21:00 and he said, "Not good enough. You have to do it again." And I used a few expletives and told him where he could go and so forth and said, "Well I won't be doing it again. It is good enough, it is excellent." Of course I shouldn't have, you don't question these things but I did, I was in a hurry to get away somewhere. But the bloke who helped me and I was really amazed
- 21:30 he says, "And I won't either." And like this corporal was not even as old as I am I think, he was juvenile, he was a kid. And the other five blokes, he is using his power now and says, "I will put you blokes on a charge." And I just used a few expletives and told him he could put as many charges as he wanted but I was not cleaning the hall again.
- 22:00 Because I said, "I will be explaining that you didn't even look at this." And I know that this wouldn't be acceptable but the other five blokes put their tails between their legs and they started to do it again. They didn't have anything to do but anyway he got these black looks and walked out the back somewhere, and I thought well I don't really want a charge and have CB to do so
- 22:30 I doubled around and I was speaking to the sergeant cook who outranked this fellow, he was only a corporal this fellow. So I spoke to the sergeant cook, I said, "What's going on with that bloke? Surely you heard what went on?" And he said, "I might have heard a little bit. Did you swear at him?" and he obviously heard what I said. And I said, "No." and he said, "Well I will see what I can do." Well anyway I didn't have
- 23:00 to front up for the charge in the afternoon when it would have been heard. At the teatime I lined up with all of the rest and he is there and he has got the black look on his face and I knew that he had lost out so I gave him a bit of the two up and walked straight past him. And the next day he
- 23:30 wasn't in our mess, he had been transferred to the officers' mess. So that was a win.

Apart from that one mess duty?

Well after that opposite to what our recruit training sergeant was like, a big bloke who was very beefy and

- 24:00 loud in his mouth, the corps training fellow we had was a smallish fellow and a former brother at a school and this guy was quite the opposite. He was one of these we get there by quiet means, and he was a very sort of an understanding sort of fellow. You could read him straight away.
- 24:30 I was right marker this day on parade and he said, "I need two volunteers." And you never volunteer for anything in the army and he said, "It could be worth your while." And I thought okay, the way to volunteer is just to stick your arm up like this and I am at the front of the line I thought okay and out of the corner of my eye I see the bloke down the end had his up.
- 25:00 And so that was two, he only wanted two volunteers, he said, "You two guys, whenever we had mess duties at five o'clock in the morning," you go through to eight o'clock at night you see? "Instead of reporting to the mess hall at five o'clock you guys can sleep in until nine." And we thought whoopee, and he said, "Then you're on another duty" and I thought "oh, okay",
- 25:30 He said, "By the way do you fellows have a bronze medallion for swimming?" and we both did as it turned out. For lifesaving. He said, "Right the new Olympic size indoor swimming pool is going to open next week and whenever we're on mess duty you guys are going to be the lifeguards and you have to wear these caps." These
- 26:00 life guard caps. And we thought whoopee, easy. "But you have to stay on duty until nine o'clock at night." Mess duty finishes about eight. And we thought that's great. And as it turned out we went down to the lifeguards and there was no one there until about ten o'clock, and the only people that were there during the day were the officers and sergeants' wives, those located on the base, so it was a pretty good duty.
- 26:30 Corps training, well apart from those things and the exercise we had at the end and exercises while we were training, in Vietnam they were called operations, exercises when you're training. I think it was a nine-day exercise in the Cunderin Mountains and that was
- 27:00 more or less to conclude our training down there.

And in any of that training what were they teaching you about Vietnam?

Nothing. Just there was really basic training and what any infantry corps training would be like. It wasn't specific to Vietnam., we did do a little bit of stuff out in the bush, but you would do that anyway.

- 27:30 **So from corps training where did you go?**

Well the date was about mid July, and as I said before, we had a choice of corps we could go to but that didn't work because they had to find a lot of infantry fellows, so the ones they had earmarked for infantry were sent to battalions.

- 28:00 I know 9 Battalion got some at that time, 6 Battalion got quite a few, and one of the other battalions got a few. At the time there would have been three battalions in Vietnam, so that left six here. I daresay all six would have got some of those people who went through Singleton in that intake. Quite a few of us went to Townsville
- 28:30 and we went by bus all of the way. Only basic stops, straight through to Townsville from Singleton, took about a day and a half. I realised possibly if you were off the bus early you might have a choice of what you did in the battalion. And the bus was full, and how many buses, there might have been one.
- 29:00 There could have been two. So the bus was full of blokes and I made it my business to get off early and as soon as you got off you were interviewed. And you were interviewed by the lieutenant who they called the adjutant; the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] interviewed, that's where RSM Cruickshank came in, he was one of the fellows interviewing and there was another fellow interviewing, probably an officer of some kind.
- 29:30 Maybe an intelligence officer. And I happened to be the second off the bus so the only fellow to beat me off was a fellow called Kilpatrick and I sort of looked after him a bit. He was a one of those fellows who sounded tough but really wasn't. Yes, he went off first and
- 30:00 I can't remember who interviewed me, I think it was the same fellow who interviewed him, it might have been the adjutant and he said he wanted to be a clerk. Okay, and I heard him say to Kilpatrick, "We don't have any room for clerks." But he sent him up to the admin company anyway. And I said I wanted to be a clerk when I came through. He says, "Look we
- 30:30 we haven't got room for clerks, but I will send you up to admin company anyway." So we both went up to admin company and we were seconded into the band. So that meant we were stretcher-bearers, stretcher-bearers actually formed the band. We were part of the band, well we were the band. And I am not a muso as I said.
- 31:00 So that's where I ended up and that's where I was for the ten months we were in Townsville, when we would go to Vietnam the stretcher-bearers would be trained as stretcher-bearers and we would be divided up amongst and we wouldn't be together you see? So we would be divided up and we would go to various companies and platoons. And you usually had one
- 31:30 stretcher-bearer in a platoon throughout the battalion, and there was about four platoons in a company. So that was the idea, and four of those stretcher-bearers became corporals and the others remained privates. I was one of the four who became corporals, three of us were national servicemen and one was
- 32:00 a regular soldier who had been there before. I remember the names, he stayed in the army that regular soldier and I know he rose to warrant officer. His name was Gordon Black or something like that and the other two, one fellow was an eleventh intake and he was my best mate in the army, a fellow called Dave Newell, and he came from Perth, Western Australia,
- 32:30 and another fellow who was a tenth intaker, and he was Max Dowler from Buderim.

In your corps training, was it all national servicemen?

Yeah. National servicemen were trained at Singleton and some national servicemen went to Puckapunyal, it depended what state they were from. Few Queenslanders, if any, went to Puckapunyal. Puckapunyal was more for regular soldiers I

- 33:00 think and other training places, but Singleton was solely national service.

So arriving at the battalion and going into the band did they ever try and make you do anything musical?

Yes. They did. I was part of the band. I actually ended up playing the bagpipes. I had experience with playing musical

- 33:30 instruments before, when I was at college I had to learn how to play the recorder and I played melodica as well but I was more a read the music sort of person because I didn't have a good ear for music. And they tried to make me into some sort of tenor drummer to begin with, and then they wanted someone for the bagpipes, and I actually volunteered because I couldn't get the beat right for this drumming stuff.
- 34:00 I actually volunteered for the bagpipes. Unfortunately there were only two of us who learnt from scratch, Max from Buderim and I. We had to learn from scratch, but I had a little bit of experience with the recorder which had similar fingering to the chanter on the bagpipes, so you might say I didn't
- 34:30 start right from scratch. Of course little Dave he was a whiz with any musical instrument and he was a great bag piper. Even before he went in the army and so was another fellow Black, they were good at

playing the bagpipes, but Max and I we had real, well I wouldn't say trouble. Bagpipe is not an easy instrument to learn. You have got to learn how to control the drones first and get them up to a

35:00 certain level and then you have got to control the bag and put a bit more effort into it to get a chanter going. Sounds like, you know what it sounds like.

Before you were allocated to the band, did they ask if you were musical at all?

No we don't get asked things like that. It's like I said before, "We want six

35:30 volunteers and that's you, you, you, you, you and you." So in the army that's how you volunteer usually. But same with the musical instruments, those who were up there at the time and weren't clerks okay, they became stretcher-bearers and because you were a stretcher-bearer you had to fill the band as well.

And at what times were the band used?

The band was only used

36:00 that I can remember to play for our march through Townsville prior to leaving for Vietnam. And we practiced for nine months for that and then we, we practiced, we only had two tunes, Max and I, and I remember what they were, The Brown Haired Maiden and Scotland the Brave.

36:30 Two tunes and we knew those tunes, we actually gained an extra piper from another unit for the day we marched through Townsville so we had five pipers and the rest were made up of tenor drummers and side drums and the big base drum and I marched in front of the big base drum because I had the least co-ordination of them. And I didn't want to lose it.

37:00 **As part of a band and a stretcher-bearer, what did day-to-day life in the battalion entail for you?**

It was easy up there at Townsville, simple. We used to go down to the band hut most of the day and just practice. But RSM Cruickshank wouldn't like to hear this, but we would just rest most of the day and post a guard and look for him or the lieutenant colonel.

37:30 They would periodically march down, we were quite a way from the rest of the battalion, about three quarters of a mile, they would march down to see how we were going and of course everything was going fine when they were there. So it was an easy time. We would go back for four o'clock dismissal time and or have lunch, march back for

38:00 lunch or whatever and go back to the band hut for the afternoon. Occasionally we had other things to do. And then at four o'clock you were dismissed and you could do what you liked. We didn't have general duties like the rest of the battalion. Admin company weren't assigned to mess duty or guard duty. So at four o'clock we would all high tail it into town. Every day, every night. And except when we did have the odd

38:30 duty at the RAP, the regimental aid post. And that was a night time duty but usually a medic or a doctor was on duty when the stretcher-bearer was there as well, so the medical doctor was actually sleeping in the RAP and the stretcher-bearer was just there for the night sort of thing to make sure that if anyone needed medical

39:00 attention, stretcher-bearers would be there to receive them sort of thing.

What training was there to be a stretcher-bearer?

Well you did a first aid course plus a little bit extra, that's about it. First aid course and a little bit extra.

And that was done at the battalion?

Yes. The medic however was much more highly trained, there was a medic in each company.

39:30 Was there one in each platoon? No, there was a medic in each company and he was much more highly trained, he would be the equivalent of an ambulance officer or a nurse or something like that. And of course the doctor was a doctor, probably went into the battalion from Civvy Street or something and had the rank of captain or above.

40:00 **So as a stretcher-bearer, what was outlined to you would be your role once you got to Vietnam?**

Well my role as a stretcher-bearer was with the platoon and I had to if the medic wasn't available, well it was up to the stretcher-bearer to treat anything and everything.

40:30 He had to do his best. And the medic would arrive as soon as possible. And yes he would treat anything from minor things to big things. And you carried a medical kit with you as well. The kit was about so size, and you would have it strapped over the top and that was extra.

41:00 And being rifle section leader I also had the claymore as well, so that weighed quite a bit more than the medical kit though. And my duty was first rifleman, and second stretcher-bearer. That's the way I

looked at it. We had to do the duties of a medic if there was no one

41:30 available.

41:33 End of tape

Tape 6

00:30 **When you went to school, did you learn much about Australia's military history?**

Not a lot, no. Gallipoli, the Anzacs. My battalion, we will get to that, my battalion was an Anzac Battalion in Vietnam.

So at what stage of

01:30 **being called up and going in and doing your basic training and corps training did you think, or did you know, that you were destined to get to Vietnam?**

I knew as soon as I got the 6th Battalion, because their tour of duty would start in approximately May 1969. I knew that as soon as we went to 6 Battalion because they had done a previous tour of

02:00 duty in 1966 and three years between going, they spend a year over there so those who went in May 66 would have come back in May 67. Then the battalion would go again in 1969, in approximately May, and spend a year there.

02:30 So we knew, because there was three battalions over there at the one time while I was there and prior to while I was there we knew it would be three years between trips. As soon as I went to battalion I knew around about May of the next year we would be going to Vietnam. I went up there in 1968 and it was May 1969 that we did leave.

03:00 I was stationed at Townsville at Lavarack Barracks, they were quite extensive, it was probably the biggest military facility in Australia at the time. And they had the capacity to house three battalions plus all of the minor units necessary for training with the battalion. You know how you talk about armoured and all of that and

03:30 other things associated, artillery and all of that sort of stuff, all of the things associated with a battalion, they were all located there and intelligence etcetera. And enough to house three battalions if necessary. I can't even remember if there was another battalion or not there with us at the time. One incident,

04:00 I can tell you a couple of little trivial things about the battalion if you like. When I went up there it took about a day and a half to get there from Singleton by bus and I developed a problem with one of my teeth and it developed into an abscess while on the bus. There was no way to get off or anything so this abscess developed on one of my teeth on my lower jaw.

04:30 And so I got up there and I had to straight away go to the dentist, and the dentist was in the minor units so I had to go up there and find the place and I eventually went up and he actually pulled the tooth because it had infected and I already had swelling under the lower jaw. So he pulled the tooth and I was given a chit, a medical chit, to say that I was relieved of all duties for the next week.

05:00 And that was prior to our very first parade at Admin Company. So we arrived on the parade ground and as usual tallest bloke I am right marker. So the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] I can't remember his name off hand, he said something about there was going to be some sort of thing going on at the high range,

05:30 some exercise and it might last a few days and I just put my hand forward and said, "Excuse me sir may I be excused from duty?" and he said, "Why?" And I said, "I have got a chit here saying I need to be relieved from all duties." "Okay right Private Stumer you go up there

06:00 to the lines and have a rest and just lie in your fartar," they call it a fart sack that's the bed. "Lie in your fart sack and take a rest." And he said, "You can go now." So I dismissed myself up through the lines. And I got the word later, the bloke next to me was a fellow called Murray and I knew him from teachers college too. He was a teacher too.

06:30 And apparently he said, "I have a chit." And he said, "When did you get this chit?" "Down at Singleton." After we did our march he must have told him, "After we did our march from Greta to Singleton," that's twenty-four miles, "I went to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and the fellow at the RAP said I have got flat feet and he excused me from marching and that also excuses me from going to Vietnam. " And the CSM said,

07:00 "Well why did you come to the battalion?" And he said, "I was sent here." And he said, "I need to be excused from marching." and he says, "Okay." And he was getting angry by this time according to the other blokes I wasn't there. He was getting angry and he said, "Right oh, you're excused from marching

duty but you report to the mess and you can be on duty down there." So Murray

- 07:30 gets out of going to the high range. And this fellow Kilpatrick he was a real flair I imagine any of the officers or NCOs he would be a nightmare for them and apparently he came out with, "Excuse me sir" when it got to him. "I got a chit."
- 08:00 "Are you excused from duty? Show me that chit." And he said, "What did you do Kilpatrick?" And he said, "I fell out of a chopper.[copter]" He did too, he fell out and he twisted his ankle down at Singleton. And the [officer's] comment was he didn't know "what this man's army was coming to", these fellows that had been sent up to him, and
- 08:30 trying to make soldiers out of them, and all of this sort of thing. So he sent him down to the mess too. But they were very sour those two because I had been given no duties for a week. That was one story there.

So you had another bit of chopper stuff at Singleton?

A little bit. In the corps training not in the other, yeah a little bit down there in corps training. It all relates to infantry training.

- 09:00 **At that stage was the battalion really starting to gear up as to go to Vietnam, as far as training was concerned?**

Probably yeah. More so towards the end, more so towards the beginning. When we came back from leave towards the end of 1968 they really got stuck into it then with certain things going on. They probably had three big exercises in at that time.

- 09:30 Now those exercises, and the whole battalion was involved in them. We had an exercise at Mount Spec which was a sixteen day exercise from memory, Mount Spec in north Queensland near Ingham and that was a shocker, that's was the worst time I had in the army. I honestly can say that. Exercise at the Mount Spec in the tropical heat and I was supposed to share this machine gun
- 10:00 with my sergeant, Tommy Bagles and two other fellows, I can't remember their names. We would walk for two days up hill and down dale and through jungle or whatever. It was the up hill stuff that always got to me, in Vietnam I didn't do much up hill stuff, the country was flatter sort of thing
- 10:30 and it wasn't a real problem. And I didn't carry a machine gun either; we were pushed doing this thing too and it was very tropical weather. I know six fellows in another company were shipped off to Ingham hospital with heat exhaustion one day, but I can remember coming out of that and I said to these two fellows behind me, "Okay it's your turn." I had been carrying it for a day and we only had another half day to go,
- 11:00 but I just looked at them and I knew there was no way in hell they were going to carry this gun. It is an extra twenty five pound plus the ammunition and there was no way they would carry it because they were bugged as it was. And so then I said to the sergeant, "Okay you are supposed to share this with us, it is your turn." And he said, "Like hell it is". And he pulled rank on me and so I ended up with that thing all of the way back
- 11:30 But I had lost so much moisture that it stopped coming out, my shirt sleeves were ringing wet and I knew I was on the verge of something like heat exhaustion and we only had a hundred yards to go and I was going up this little hill to our camp and I got a cramp in both legs.
- 12:00 And it was all I could do just to get there and I didn't have any real medical attention for those. But I always get recurring cramps after I do activity even these days and I always get them in those same places. So it goes right back to there.

You're probably one of the few blokes who did that, carrying the sixty all of the way.

It was a shocker but I was supposed to share it with those three blokes.

- 12:30 We did that exercise at Ingham. And then we did Canungra, everybody who went overseas got through Canungra.

We hear horror stories about Canungra?

Well I didn't think it compared with this thing at Ingham. You're on the go all of the time and we had to do all

- 13:00 whatever they did there, I don't remember most of the things. But it went on for a month and it was in a real, as though it was a real situation you had to do pickets at night and all of that sort of rubbish.

Can I just ask you there, did they have enemy there to harass you and that sort of stuff?

I think they might have. I can't even remember on some when we were out in the bush or something,

- 13:30 they had enemy in corps training actually, yeah.

What about the mock valises they had there?

Look I do remember the obstacle course.

What do you remember about that?

I remember that we had to do it in a certain time and there was no way in hell I was going to do it a second time so I did it in a certain time. Barbed wire and they fire a gun over the top of it, live rounds.

- 14:00 And I was fairly big bugger so I got caught up in the barbed wire getting through. I wasn't going to waste any time. And then there is the bear pit, that's a good one. Do you know anything about that?

Tell us.

There is a wall and you have to go over this wall and you went straight into this soup. It was like pig shit fair dinkum, you went straight over and it smelt like it too.

- 14:30 Just muddy water and being a tall fellow I just managed one hook of my feet on the wall and my hands on the top and I was sort of over, I sort of bolted over. And went straight in and I tell you what I went right under. And then you go to the river where you have to jump off a thirty feet tower, but your time
- 15:00 ceased when you got to the tower because you had to wait to get up the tower and so forth and my sergeant was just in front of me and we were going up the steps of the tower this guy was up the top of the tower, he was a captain, I can't remember what area he was, he wasn't one of the infantry blokes, he was something else. And he was standing up there and there was no way that he would jump. And they were trying to coax him to jump, there were life savers in the water and they were trying to coax him to jump. Thirty foot is a fair height
- 15:30 if you have never been up there, I don't think this fellow could swim or swim well or something, and there was no way he was going to jump. And we got up to the top and there was a few blokes would fit up the top and he is standing near the edge and the serge looks at me and he is one of these Pommy [English] blokes, skinny Pommy blokes and he has got a bit of humour about him, and he looks at me and he goes wink and he just brushes up behind him and
- 16:00 phhht, "Oh sorry." And he is gone. But anyway he didn't get into any strife over that, it was just an accident he said anyway.

Did you get any leave after Canungra as a reward ?

We had what we called pre-embarkation leave and I think that would have been after we were at Shoalwater Bay, late April sometime.

- 16:30 And we had about a week off then.

Was Shoalwater the last big exercise you had before you left?

Yes.

What was that like?

I can't remember much about it. I found some letters last night and I read a few and I found some particulars about Shoalwater and Canungra and Vietnam and those things and I found out from the letters that it was quite wet at Shoalwater bay. I can't even remember it actually.

- 17:00 I do remember going into there in a Caribou [military transport plane]. I think it was a Caribou, they rattle and shake and whatever.

So you got pre-embarkation leave just before going?

Probably a week or two prior to going.

Where did you go?

Here, I came home.

So was there a bit of a farewell party or anything for you?

Probably but I can't remember that. It wasn't something that stood out in my mind.

Do you remember mum and dad saying goodbye?

- 17:30 Yeah I can remember, I met Corinne prior to this. I met Corinne in the December prior to this and I think I might have went somewhere with Corinne, is that right Corinne? Yes.

Where did you meet?

I met Corinne, she worked in a bank I met Corinne on New Years Eve 68.

- 18:00 I had been home on leave from Townsville and I was going to the coast on New Years Eve to live it up with a mate from Boonah. And my brother was coming as well. And we heard that there had been a great hail storm down there and we thought well we won't go and he said he had been invited to a party

and he said, "Well you two can gatecrash."

- 18:30 So we went along to the party as well. It seems that Corinne was invited to the party as well from the bank and we were there and I can remember Corinne trying to make a line for my brother, but he wasn't interested, so I thought I might take up with her. So that's when I met Corinne and I will tell you a little story about the next night or two nights after that or something
- 19:00 I am still there and I says, "Why don't we go to the dance down at Harrisville?" I didn't know she was a dancer. And I didn't have my car so I says to my brother Tim, "Hey are you going to the dance?" and he says, "Oh yeah I might." So I said, "Hey can I drive?" and he said, "Yeah all right you can drive."
- 19:30 And he sat in the back. It was one of these little old [Ford] Consuls. And Corinne was staying with some people down at the end of church street in Boonah and we drove down there and it was the last house or something and it had a gate opening out, it was a little bit of a farm on the edge of town. And I said,
- 20:00 "Right oh I will drive around and pick Corinne up and you wait here by the gate, save opening it twice, I won't be a jiff." So I get there and Corinne is not ready, twenty minutes later still there. I am sitting in the car and when I went in I drove around this huge stump about as wide as this lounge and that high, and they used it as a table for barbeques and things. And I drove around it and waited in front of it. I am just sitting there twiddling my thumbs waiting as usual for
- 20:30 the fairer sex and so she eventually comes out, gets in the car and I just take off looked in the rear window, nothing there, so I forgot about the stump. Whacko, I hit the back of it dented the bumper right in and, and even dented a little bit of the boot. And I said, "Corinne don't say anything about this to Tim we will go anyway." So he hops in and we pick up his mate
- 21:00 down at Rhodvale somewhere and we got to this dance at Harrisville and Corinne and I go to the dance and they go to the hotel. About half past ten they come in and Tim is cursing away, "Some dirty so and so has run into my car and pissed off!" [run away] I didn't say anything, but we did tell him about ten years later. That was a bit mean wasn't it?
- 21:30 **Besides the training preparation how were you gearing up, getting gear packed and all of that sort of thing for going over with the battalion?**
- It wasn't a big deal. Of course on the battalion basis they probably
- 22:00 big time organization but it didn't concern me too much. I just lived an ordinary easygoing life at the thing and the CO [commanding officer] used to give us a long weekend every month, so we had the Monday off every month, unless the company was on duty, the duty company didn't have a long weekend but Admin Company didn't have duty so
- 22:30 we had all of the long weekends. And I can remember on one long weekend Kilpatrick, he was a stretcher-bearer too, he didn't arrive back for the Tuesday morning parade, so we had to call a roll, the CSM did, came to Kilpatrick's name, "Private Kilpatrick." He said it twice or three times no answer. "Anyone know where Kilpatrick is?" No answer.
- 23:00 So AWOL [absent without official leave] it is marked down in the book. AWOL. So we thought where the hell is Kilpatrick. See he went up to visit his mother who was in Cairns for the three days and he came back on the Monday night and he has gone on the rampage in town and he has become drunk and disorderly. And the coppers,
- 23:30 the civilian coppers picked him up and put him in the clink [jail] and he had to front the magistrate the next morning. So about ten o'clock the next morning the guard house gets a phone call, as I understand the guy in the guard house took it, probably the leader of the guard and the question was, it came from the magistrate's court, a copper in there had rung and said, "Do you have a fellow out there called Francis Ellsworth II
- 24:00 Kilpatrick?" Well first of all he said his whole name. "Francis Augustan Ellsworth II Aloysius Kilpatrick." That was his name you wouldn't believe it, but it was. Everybody knew Kilpatrick and this fellow says, "Yes we have got a fellow by that name here."
- 24:30 And the copper just dropped the receiver because Kilpatrick had obviously told him his name and he wouldn't believe him. And he has gone up in front of the magistrate and was introduced by full name, all of those names. And the magistrate said, "Stand up son when I am talking to you." And he stood up and he says, "Francis you have been punished enough, you're free to go."
- 25:00 **Did he still get nailed when he got back to the barracks?**

Well that's what he told us so I guess it's true. No, that was excuse enough, he might have had to do a bit of CB, I am not sure.

So what were you feeling when it was getting closer to embarking to Vietnam?

I just can't

25:30 remember what my feelings were. I suppose everyone was a bit apprehensive but we just kept enjoying ourselves.

How did you go over?

We went over on the [aircraft carrier HMAS] Sydney and I believe from one of those letters I read up there, I believe it was the first time the Sydney departed from a city other than a capital city. And so yes we went on the Sydney. The day before we left on the Sydney the Townsville people

26:00 had a holiday and we did a march through Townsville, the whole battalion, and we in the band. We were televised too and so forth.

And how did that go for you?

It went well I played one tune right through, the second tune I lost it and I wasn't game to get back into it so I just kept the drones going and pretended I was playing; the other four guys did all right.

So nobody would miss?

Nobody noticed no. But when

26:30 I was we had practiced playing the pipes for quite a while and I was pretty proficient at that two tunes but then we started to put the march together with it, well I would either lose my step or lose my fingering. One or the other so it took a while to get both going together. But there was no way I was going to try and get back into that

27:00 tune once I had missed a beat, so I just made the drones and kept going. I have to say this about the Townsville people, they regarded us as their battalion. I was amazed by the turn out. They had a holiday and you would think they would go and have some fun but I reckon the whole of Townsville was there, they were just so thick from the shops out to the street.

27:30 And the tenor drummers were actually donging people on the head to keep them back. So it was a big thing, streamers and all of that sort of stuff. We were very welcome, they adopted us as their battalion. And we got on well with the townspeople, the ten months we were there.

That must have been a great way to leave?

It was it was very good. We knew a lot of the locals too because we

28:00 used to go there every night and every Saturday night we used to go to the Allan Hotel. The nurses quarters were opposite that and there would be a lot of nurses there and a lot of good times. It was a good place to be.

Where was Sydney anchored?

Just off Townsville somewhere, I don't know how we got out to it, we had to climb on, there was no plank or anything,

28:30 they took us out in boats I presume and we got on that way we climbed up rope ladders or something and got on board. And I do remember reading in one of the letters last night that on the way over that we met up with the HMAS Vampire which was one of the warships or something that Australia had, and I think the admiral transferred from

29:00 the Vampire to the Sydney during that time. They put a heavy wire line down to the Vampire and he came on board on a sort of a chair. It was an interesting thing. They did live firing from the Sydney at various targets. It took eleven days to get over there and my job on the Sydney was assistant editor.

29:30 I was dobb'd in by the fellow in charge of the stretcher-bearer platoon. He knew I was a teacher but he didn't know I couldn't type. And I was in the orderly room for a month at one stage for Admin Company, used as a clerk too, they had three clerks there and all three disappeared. One got out and one went somewhere else on a course, and they seconded me but I couldn't

30:00 type. And I had to get a lot of the typing done by the Q store clerks. But I did try using two fingers. But I had to collect the news from a command post or something, and I got the news from Darwin or Singapore whichever was the closest, and we sort of published this Syd News and I had to distribute it as well. Which was the news for the ship.

30:30 And they would do phys ed every morning up on the deck and live firing in the blazing hot sun and I got out of all of that by just doing this.

You have a knack of getting good jobs don't you?

Well I didn't volunteer for it or anything, I was quite prepared to do the other by the fellow who was in charge of the stretcher-bearers,

31:00 apparently the fellow in charge of the newspaper wanted someone from the army to assist him. This is a naval bloke and he went to Admin Company and there were half a dozen BHQ [battalion headquarters]

fellows who typed and this fellow bypassed them, he knew I was a school teacher I think that was the story and he told me, "Well you have got to do that job." I didn't mind.

31:30 **It would have been an interesting way to spend your time going over there?**

Yeah but I had to type two fingered about four pages.

And then how many copies would you have to run off?

Enough for each person on the ship and that would have been about one thousand five hundred.

And how would you run those off with a gestetner [copier] or something?

Yeah, but I didn't do it every day. I compiled the news together and it might have been weekly, so I might have done two complete ones.

32:00 But I had to work up to this over the time.

What else do you remember of the time going over?

Well they had a ration of beer, each soldier got a ration of beer each day and that was after their day was complete. They trained all day on the deck, it was really to acclimatise the eleven days over and they got a two twenty-six ounce cans they were, Resch's, New

32:30 South Wales stuff, and that was all they had. But each soldier got two twenty- six ounce cans each day. Some of them didn't drink it all so others acquired more. And then they played 'housie' [gambling game] of a night time, you know bingo. Soldiers and sailors alike after dinner in the mess hall they played housie and there would have been six hundred

33:00 soldiers on the ship and seven hundred sailors.

What were the sleeping arrangements like?

I thought I was on the deck below the top deck, but in the letter I found we were on the fourth deck. Hammocks, strung up. They were the sleeping arrangements. Hot as hell on that ship because they had no air conditioning in it, I don't know if they have any air going through it. It was hot as hell, the lower down you got the hotter it got,

33:30 I pity the blokes who were down in the engine room and the cookhouses. When I went down to do the Syd News it was the fourth or fifth deck down and it was bloody hot down there. Anyway they had a scare on the way over, man overboard. So they had to stop the Sydney and turn it around and come back and

34:00 it took six miles if I remember correctly to stop her, and it was a false alarm. There was entertainment one night, I didn't get to see it because I had to do something else. But my mate Dave was the main entertainer or the best one and he was very good at music and singing, he actually did it in clubs in Perth before he went into the army.

34:30 He was a Commonwealth bank employee, but he did clubs out as far as Kalgoorlie.

How did the navy blokes get along with the army blokes?

Oh pretty well. That was their job, they were doing their job going over there. They actually got eligible service eventually on the Sydney.

35:00 I can remember they did live firing with their big guns on the Sydney, they sent out smoke about five or six miles out, probably less than that and then they would fire at where the smoke exploded. That was their practice.

As you got closer to Vietnam, did you notice the mood on the ship change?

I can't remember. But I did know that when we

35:30 disembarked they had those old like World War II things they used at Dunkirk, flat bottomed boats and the soldiers are inside. And the guys who had been before of course put the shits up [scared] the ones that hadn't been before., they said, "Just leave your safety catches on but be at the ready." And we all had flak jackets on and helmets, that's the

36:00 only time that we ever wore a helmet in Vietnam, except that somebody who fired something into a base somewhere. But I didn't have a helmet out in the bush, no one had a helmet or a flak jacket. So they said, "Right oh, just leave the firing catch on but be at the ready." And we were landing and I thought, "God, what are we in for?". And

36:30 they dropped the side down and the first thing I saw was guys in ordinary jeans and shorts on the wharves, "there is something wrong here." We were at Vung Tau I think it was Vung Tau, I can't even remember where we went in. So we were either choppered [helicoptered] into somewhere

37:00 and then put in trucks I think and taken to Nui Dat, that's where it started.

So what were your very first impressions, once you landed, what were your impressions of the country?

It was a nice looking country, there was nothing untoward. When we got to Nui Dat all barbed wired around and everything and perimeter barbed wire, square kilometres of it,

37:30 huge base, like a town or community. Located in Nui Dat at the peak when there were three battalions there, well one would be out bush, but located in Nui Dat was something like three thousand men. And I think the back up in Vung Tau was more like five thousand and being in Vung Tau

38:00 was like being in Townsville, there was nothing to fear in Vung Tau. Except a few communicable diseases that people might communicate from time to time. But Nui Dat was perhaps a little different You had tents and you had sand bagged walls,

38:30 that's what you slept in, about four blokes would sleep in one, so you had like a little house and one tent and about sand bagged walls up to that height. And when you slept you slept below the level of the wall so if they did fire any rockets or anything the sandbags would cope with that. Unless you had a direct hit, but that was pretty unlikely.

39:00 It was like a community, set up with buildings and so forth. The Americans even had their big 155s [artillery pieces] over one section, and there was an airstrip as well. B52s [bombers] and Caribous could land on that, all other helicopter aircraft, you know Chinooks with the two rotors, and Iroquois

39:30 all landing in there, it is quite big. They had a large PX [postal exchange], that's a supply of things you can buy radios and stereo systems and that stuff at cheap prices. It was all set up, it was a good set up actually. At that stage the wire had all been completed and there were gun positions at the wire

40:00 for picket duties during the night. But my section, some of them may have done duty, but my section did duty on the CHQ [company headquarters] most of the time. That was company headquarters, and that was radio, had to man the radio during the night. Only one bloke needed to do that so there was one bloke on there for two hours, and there might have been

40:30 five other blokes out on a gun somewhere. That was every night. You were on duty all of the time in Vietnam except for the thirty-six hours that you went on R and C [rest in country] that was in Vung Tau, and you went for thirty-six hours. And you had a five day period where you could go on R and R [rest and recreation] which

41:00 was rest outside of country and you had a choice, you had to nominate that at some stage and I was booked to go to Thailand, but I didn't go. My time for coming home was put forward and I thought ,no I am not going to waste this thousand bucks going over there, I will keep it and put it towards my car when I get home.

41:22 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 **Over that whole, during the time with the battalion in Townsville or initially when you got to Vietnam, how was it being a national serviceman, how were you received by the regulars?**

I think we were received fairly well. There weren't many instances of

01:00 disapproval and we were absorbed fairly well, although we tended to, in my time, myself most of my friends seemed to be national servicemen, but that was not always the case, we would have a drink with others. But even the people I went out with tended to be people that I knew down at Singleton and continued those friendships. I just gravitated towards those people,

01:30 they had the right personalities or they were people who I had things in common with, but it wasn't because we weren't accepted or anything. I am quite sure we were accepted by the regs and likewise we accepted them. We were ready to accept them more so than they were to us. Because that's the place, that's their domain and I did find

02:00 well no, I didn't find any problems at all with the regular soldiers and national servicemen getting on together.

Was there ribbing that went on?

We were just regarded as 6th Battalion, didn't matter if you were a nasho or reg, we didn't refer to ourselves even as nashos in those days.

02:30 **You spoke about the trip over on the Sydney, as being a form of acclimatisation, was there a**

further acclimatisation period once you got over to Vietnam?

Well we did most of our acclimatisation in Townsville and on the Sydney. Acclimatisation our exercise at Mount Spec definitely was to get us organised for the

03:00 tropical climate, it was hotter and harder than in Vietnam I think. And on the ship you had the heat every day and there was no air conditioning down below. You really got acclimatised on the aircraft carrier it was, the Sydney. But when we got to Vietnam we had ten days in Nui Dat before we went on patrol,

03:30 I think it might have been ten days. It was we had ten days at least in Nui Dat before going on the first operation.

Do you recall your first operation?

Yeah I do. I don't remember what it was called, I think it was in the area around Binh Ba somewhere and I was in a firebase

04:00 for most of the time. We would do the odd patrol from the firebase and the firebase was where the headquarters of the field operation is, and the firebase during that whole operation was not attacked at any stage but there were attacks launched from the firebase. I remember on one occasion that B Company

04:30 was involved in a contact and we gave them artillery and mortar support. In going to a bunker they went into a bunker system and were involved in some sort of a battle. And artillery and mortar support went from the firebase and we usually dug in in a firebase

05:00 and had overhead cover and all of that sort of stuff. There was rubber around Binh Ba, rubber plantations, but we weren't in the rubber as far as I know, we were in the jungle terrain, reddish sort of soil I remember. And we had

05:30 APCs [armoured personnel carriers] coming in on occasions and I think a couple of tanks might have been around.

Can you describe the firebase?

It is just an area within the bush somewhere, parts may be cleared, other parts in amongst the trees and so forth. From what I remember of this one, it wasn't an open one, it wasn't completely cleared or anything.

06:00 And you were located in amongst the trees and the firebase would probably spread for a couple of hundred metres in either direction, with mortars and artillery in one area. And the rest away from that area because when the mortars fired those blokes usually had earmuffs and the other soldiers didn't.

06:30 Sometimes a pioneer platoon might have been in the firebase as well. They are the trackers, tracker platoon you might call them. Pioneer platoon also used chainsaws and whatever to cut stuff down but their main role was tracking.

So what sort of specific tasks would you have done in that operation?

That operation?

07:00 Apart from the odd call out with platoon or company or something I usually stayed around the firebase and did medical duties more than anything on that particular one. But I do remember going on a number of occasions on day patrols. But come back to the firebase on most occasions.

07:30 See I was actually what they call N support company. I was the stretcher-bearer, there was a medic with me, he was housed with me. His name was Regan I think, I can't remember. I got medevaced [medically evacuated] out of the firebase,

08:00 I think it might have been the next one. I got a fever or something and ended up getting medevaced out and so I was one of the medevac at that time. The chopper came in, dropped down the litter or whatever they called it. The length of a man, a wire basket, and you lie in that and they pull you into the chopper.

08:30 And so I got medevaced to 4th Field Ambulance and was there for four days. I had high temperature and my white blood cells outnumbered my red and I stayed there until it righted itself and then went back.

On that first operation though, what was your first experience of patrolling?

09:00 Just like what we had been trained for, but always alert. And most people remained alert over the whole time they were there. But it became easy for some people to not care and switch off because it seemed so long to go for some.

09:30 If you had a soldier being told what to do all of the time I daresay it would be harder than those who were actually doing the telling and knew what was going on. I stayed in support base for the first half of

the time I was there and then I was transferred to A Company later on and that was

10:00 different. I was out on patrol all of the time.

In those initial patrols what were you thinking about finally being in Vietnam?

Well I can't remember too much about what happened during those. I know that you were full on and you wanted to get it

10:30 over with as quickly as possible but each day went so slowly and time, you were doing the same thing over and over, day long. Looking, searching, who knows who was looking at you, whether the enemy was there or wasn't there, you sort of had that over you all of the time. And being

11:00 infantry you would come into direct contact with them if you came across them. And it would be well you or me sort of thing, you had to have that in your mind all of the time. When we patrolled we patrolled so that you saw the fellow in front of you or he was no more than ten metres in front of you. If you were in open country you wouldn't

11:30 allow him to be more than ten metres in front. So your whole section, it wouldn't spread perhaps longer than a hundred metres, ten men in a section. But if you were in thick bush you may have been closer than that because you needed to see the fellow in front of you and never lose sight of him.

In that Binh Ba area with thee initial patrols, what was the visibility?

12:00 The bush was fairly thick although it wasn't what I call real rain forests and well you're probably five or six metres apart on patrol.

Did you have any contact in those early patrols?

No, I had no contact during that operation when I patrolled by we had a contact [with the enemy] on a you might say company

12:30 basis. When B Company was out they had a contact and we supported them in the contact from the firebase.

And how is that done?

That was done with the mortars and artillery.

But I mean who was talking to whom?

Over the radio. There, each section has a radio, that's ten men and the fellow doing the communication would have probably been the fellow in charge, in B Company.

13:00 He would have made direct communications with the firebase. And to the person in charge or the person in charge of the mortars.

So during the time you were supporting B Company what would you have been doing?

We were on stand by in the weapons pits and whatever.

13:30 Like on alert sort of thing, even though the actual contact was a couple of hundred metres away.

Could you hear it?

Oh yeah you could see it too, it went on into the night. You could see the tracer, it wasn't every bullet that was a tracer bullet, probably one in about five or six or something like that. And you could see the red tracer.

14:00 **Most men have said to us in the middle of a contact there is no time to think, adrenalin and training kicks in?**

Where I was at that time wasn't in the middle of it.

Knowing that you could be sent out there, is that a harrowing time?

14:30 Well it might be harrowing at the time but you're trained to do that so you do it, you don't think twice about it.

And when you were first talking about that operation you were talking about digging in, can you explain that?

That's normally when you're on patrol in the jungle you just dig shell scrapes, and they're only about nine inches in depth, just so your body can lie in there and you're flat to the ground.

15:00 That's called a shell scrape. But if you're going to be there on a more permanent basis for like a month, you dig a, I have forgotten the term for it, I have been out that long. You dig where you can have your gun over the top and for me on my side I have it down about four feet, six or five feet so the gun would be just there and my head and that part would be above.

- 15:30 And then you have a sleeping bay going back from that side, and the other fellow has a sleeping bay going back from the other side. That's done not so deep, say three foot six deep a sleeping bay and then you have overhead cover, like logs put on the top, so it covers the top. And you have just got a dark hole in there.
- 16:00 And I have a feeling that I might have developed this fever from having my head in that thing and not much air and whatever. And this logs, they were covered with leaves and soil so you don't even see it is there. It is covered with leaves and soil and it looks like the surrounding ground. So where your sleeping bay is you can't even see it. Except for when you enter it from your weapon pit.
- 16:30 **And what equipment is used to dig those?**
- Entrenching tool. Entrenching tool is a little shovel with a pick on the end of it and it folds up and goes in your pack. The entrenching tool is about that long, has a little shovel about that size and at the back of it is a little pick like thing to dig stuff out and then you shovel it out. And that's what you dig it with, and if you're lucky in a firebase
- 17:00 and they have got big shovels well you second one of those. And you can do it much quicker.
- How long would it take to dig one of those?**
- It would take you all day to dig one of those with an entrenching tool. But the shell scrape is something you should be able to dig in a matter of half an hour.
- On an operation like that, would the position of those pits be moved?**
- 17:30 No the positions are set so they are facing outwards. To where the enemy might come from, never facing inwards, they are all facing outwards, all of these pits in a circle with overhead cover facing outwards and there is two blokes in each one.
- So on an operation like that, once you were there dug in, do you stay put in that position?**
- That's in a firebase, that's the central field
- 18:00 organising position from where battle is organised. That's the actual firebase. And in the firebase the RSM would be in the firebase, the CO he always went out bush with us but he always went to the firebase, that's his role being in the firebase. Doctor would be in the firebase.
- 18:30 The mortar platoon is in the firebase, if they have got artillery out there they would be in the firebase. Medical representation apart from the doctor, the doctor always has a stretcher-bearer and a medic somewhere in the firebase and various other people.
- 19:00 People who normally don't go with the rifle companies but who have a high rank or something might be in the fire support base.
- So on that operation you were assisting the medic as well were you?**
- Yeah, I was.
- Was there many casualties on that?**
- No.
- So what would you have been doing?**
- Just treatment for ant bites and prickly heat and
- 19:30 tinea, ring tinea. All of those sorts of things.
- How much medical equipment do you have with you?**
- A limited amount, but the medic had more than I did.
- Do you recall what was in yours?**
- Yes I recall some of the things, have still got the pack upstairs. You had tablets for relieving headaches and things, you had Codral and you had Codeine.
- 20:00 In my bag I also had two ampoules of morphine, the medic carried those as well. You only administered morphine if the person suffered from a wound to the limbs. If he suffered a wound to the head or chest or stomach you wouldn't administer morphine
- 20:30 because morphine enlarges the pupil and it stays enlarged. When the person is in a coma he can also have the same symptoms and it wouldn't be wise to administer morphine knowing that it possibly might be a coma that he could be in. So you could give him other things, but he more or less has to suffer until he gets further treatment.
- 21:00 But if he has had a limb injury, such as a wound to the leg, arm or whatever or even blown off, you give

him morphine to ease the pain.

And so for you was that first operation relatively smooth?

Yes it was smooth.

21:30 Other parts of the Battalion had contacts and I was reading somewhere late night in a letter that I think there were three killed, two or three fellows killed in the battalion during that operation and a number wounded. And there were quite a few enemy, they called them body count, who were killed. The

22:00 enemy tried to take away their own bodies just like we would. But they weren't always successful in taking them away. So if we found bodies they were called 'kills', it is a bit hard isn't it? But they were called kills and they were called body count. But other than that if there were others killed it was an 'unknown'.

22:30 **So it could only be counted as a kill if you....?**

Had the body.

Did that have any effect on you?

Well I didn't think so at the time but these things are just subconscious inflictions I suppose. But the first operation for me was smooth.

So after that first operation it was back to Nui Dat?

23:00 Yes for twelve days. And during those twelve days you went on leave for thirty-six hours. But you were still on duty twenty-four hours at Nui Dat. Like you did day and night duties. Out bush you did pickets, there would be two pickets every night on the gun or on the radio. Picket on the gun involved, in the firebase I did picket on the gun with my medic

23:30 and others, I just recall how the whole situation was set up in the first operation. It was a bit new to me and I just can't recall. But I imagine it would have been two hours on four hours sleep, same as every other one that I did. And you did two of those in the night, two hours on, four hours sleep, two hours picket,

24:00 so if you did the first on six to eight, you got four hours sleep until twelve and then you did picket until two and you don't sleep on picket.

Did anyone ever, that you know of?

Not that I know of. It is a chargeable offence to go to sleep on picket,

24:30 doesn't matter how tired you are.

So after that first operation back to Nui Dat where did you go for your R and C? [Rest in Country]

Vung Tau, we would always go to Vung Tau for rest in country, go by truck. You were armed took your whatever with you. And on the way down you passed through the capital city of Phuoc Tuy province. And for you a mark of the

25:00 where the war was, you always passed this cinema and it had a hole in the wall this big where it was shelled or something, so it was a good reminder. So you went through Baria, which was the capital of the province and on to Vung Tau. Vung Tau was perhaps a city of a hundred and fifty thousand and that's right

25:30 down the south, not far from the Mekong Delta.

So you had thirty-six hours there?

Thirty-six hours yep. And we went to the Badcoe Club that's where we would be housed. And you had to observe curfew just like everybody else, curfew was eleven o'clock so you had to be back by eleven o'clock unless you stayed out all night and if you stayed out all night well you

26:00 stayed out all night, but you don't go roaming the streets otherwise you're fair game for the 'white mice'.

Tell us about the 'white mice'?

The white mice are the South Vietnamese police. They are in the city and they were pretty strict in their handling of things.

26:30 **Did you have any encounters with them?**

No never.

Did you hear of anyone else?

Yeah I think some might have, but I can't recall at this point. Now in Vung Tau you had some Americans on leave as well. The interesting thing was the Americans had their own bars, the Americans went to their own bars or whatever and most of the Americans that I knew of were Negroes

27:00 and they were another class. And I am not racist or anything I am just saying they behaved fairly differently from Australian soldiers, you might say. And so you avoided places where they were, but we were on the majority so we went to

27:30 all of those places that were regarded as on beat for Australians.

We have heard a fair bit about the seedy side of life in Vietnam, what did you see of that?

Have you? Well I heard and saw a bit of it. the bars are the houses of prostitution, they have drinks and things there too. "You buy me Saigon tea?"

28:00 No, no. You number ten ooktaloi." "Yeah I will buy you a Saigon Tea." " Number one, ooktaloi. " So there were only two types of ooktaloi, ooktaloi was Australian. Only two types, number one and number ten, you were a bugger if you were number ten and you were alright if you were number one. But that's a sort of a custom, buying what they call Saigon Tea, a bit of green rubbish.

28:30 Coming form a small country town here, was that scene a shock to you?

No it wasn't a shock no. Those soldiers who decided to have an extra good time in the bars,

29:00 that was probably the best place to go rather than the bars, they were actually checked out by army medical teams and they were given various injections to curb any sort of contagious things that might happen.

The bar girls were?

Yes, and they readily accepted.

29:30 But you went somewhere else to these exotic places where these med teams hadn't operated and there was a big likelihood that the soldier could contract things like gonorrhoea and stuff like that. And it was my job when I was located in Nui Dat to sometimes go to the main RAP,

30:00 not the A Company one, the battalion aid post and I had to sometimes give the course of injections. It lasted six days, one injection each day, top outer quarter of the cheek. And so that's the penalty for catching gonorrhoea, they had to get it cured.

30:30 Men that came to you with cases of VD what was their outlook on it?

Well they wanted to get it fixed, didn't they? So they wouldn't get fixed any other way so they had to have this course of penicillin injections.

Were they sheepish about it, or was it part of life?

Probably it was more a part of life. But they probably were embarrassed that they caught it. Depended on the bloke.

31:00 The only ones who really caught it were those who didn't go to the recognised bars. Now we had the New Zealanders attached to our battalion too, they were Whiskey and the Victor Companies, they came direct from Malaya to Vietnam. We hadn't had any contact with them until

31:30 we were in Vietnam and they became attached to us in Vietnam. I am not sure of this but it is possible that they may have been in Vietnam with the previous battalion, either 2 or 4 and just handed over to 6th battalion and it was on going. But they did a tour of duty in Malaya before they went to Vietnam and I think it was a two year tour of duty overall. One thing I noticed about the New Zealanders,

32:00 Whiskey Company was housed next to A Company, which I was in for the last three months I was there and we sometimes went over to their boozier of a night. And I noticed that all of the Ors [other ranks], privates and other ranks and corporals were generally Maoris. And it also came to my notice that most of the officers were

32:30 white, that stood out in my memory. To me that was a little too much of a co-incidence. It is just possible that Maoris didn't go through officer training school and were satisfied with ordinary ranks, I don't know.

How did that come about that you were moved to A Company?

I was moved to A Company after an operation in the Long Hais, the

33:00 Long Hais are a mountain range in Vietnam and I went to the firebase in the Long Hais. We followed 5 RAR into the Long Hais and we knew that the Long Hais was a place we were rather apprehensive about going to. There were a lot of mines in the Long Hais. Many of the mines were Australian mines that were put in by the 7th Battalion in previous times.

- 33:30 They mined down from north of Dak To to the coast which is about ten kilometres and I think they established things at certain intervals like pill boxes and certain things, but this fell down once some of the battalions left and the ARVN [Army of the Republic of (South) Viet Nam] was supposed to be controlling these things and not allowing the
- 34:00 Viet Cong through. But somehow it fell down I think. I am not sure of the particulars but going to the Long Hais. Well I was housed in the firebase, I was the immediate stretcher-bearer assistant to the doctor and I was with the doctor most of the time in the Long Hai firebase, he also had a medic, Corporal Pratt. He spoke with a lisp and said,
- 34:30 "Pwatt." But yes. I won't hold that against him. he was the medic and I was the stretcher-bearer corporal with the doctor. And there was an underground RAP established in the Long Hais, we just took over from 5 RAR and they already had that, it was already established we didn't have to dig it. So it was sand bagged over the top, iron and then sand bags over
- 35:00 the top and you went underground to the RAP. Now I had a personal place where I slept outside, I had a hole dug five feet deep and a hoochie [tent] over the top and everyone else was around the area in the firebase in holes in the ground. It was sandy country about a hundred yards further over in the firebase.
- 35:30 the Americans had two big guns, 155s, and they were mounted on tracks, they fired every night all night at different intervals and when they fired they just bounced the tracks and everything back about ten feet and then move them forward and they would go on all night. And they bombarded
- 36:00 the mountain range all night with those, which we weren't too far away less that four thousand metres away from it. And on the other side of the mountain range an American cruiser was located and they fired at the mountain range from that side and this went on all night. So you can imagine, when those things fired the ground actually shock and even though you're a hundred metres away you would have sand falling in,
- 36:30 reverberating all of the time, and that went on all night so it wasn't very nice to try and get some sleep. So going on with the RAP, how come I went to A Company. The doctor was, I called him a real doctor I don't know whether he did training in the army to be a soldier
- 37:00 or he just went straight from civvie street into the army to be a doctor, I really don't know, but he was a real doctor and he was a good doctor, that's my assessment. But I didn't consider him a real warrior or a top soldier. Now I might be talking out of place here, but I am just going ahead to say what it was.
- 37:30 I spent most of my time in the firebase, did the odd perimeter patrol in the evenings and always did picket on one of the guns at night with Corporal Pratt, and on the 20th of July 1969 do you know what happened on the 20th of July?
- 38:00 Armstrong landed on the moon, but also there was a big mine explosion out in A Company and they were on patrol somewhere out in the Long Hais, somewhere out in the bush. And the lieutenant in A Company in charge of a certain platoon, he was killed. He actually walked on the mine, and there was seventeen others wounded.
- 38:30 I am a stickler for figures and we got a call from there and the doctor said, "Get the gear ready. You and I are going out." And he said, "There is only room for you and I on the little chopper, you and I are going out, we are going to fix the injured and send them on their way." And just before we were due to go out the CO came over and he said, "I want to go out and survey the damage." That's the fellow in charge of
- 39:00 the battalion, the big boss, Lieutenant Colonel Butler. So doc says to me, "Right you stay here, I will go out and we will have the medic out there." Hopefully he wasn't cleaned up as well. And he went out with the Lieutenant Colonel and next thing we heard there had been another mine explosion.
- 39:30 They had fixed up the wounded and they were coming back along a track cleared by the engineers and it was taped, somehow they had come in contact with another mine and the doctor was blinded and had his legs broken and the fellow behind was killed and the rest of the platoon was injured, except for three blokes. So they only had
- 40:00 three survivors out of the thirty odd in the platoon. Apart from killed and wounded. All of the wounded were sent either to Vung Tau or Australia, the CO ended up spending a month in Vung Tau hospital. He had shrapnel wounds to the legs and he came back to the battalion after about a month and this happened on the 20th of July.
- 40:30 There is a band called "Red Gum". "Red Gum" actually wrote a song about that incident. It was called When I was Only Nineteen .You might know the song? Red Gum wrote that song and it has been modified or whatever by John Williamson and others I suppose over a period of time, but the original lyrics were
- 41:00 written by Red Gum, you might find. I know, I heard it at the Anzac Ceremony this year. And it had somewhere in there that it happened in June, well okay they needed June to rhyme with moon but it is about that incident. And it is about a nineteen year old who lost his foot in the incident.
- 41:28 End of tape

Tape 8

00:30 **So it was as a result of that incident that you got sent to A company?**

Yes I remained in support company for the remainder of that operation but when I got back to Nui Dat I was transferred into A Company and I hadn't finished with that operation. The doctor who replaced Captain Anderson,

01:00 that was the previous doctor. The doctor who replaced him was just the opposite, he was a real warrior and he wore a pistol on his belt and he got us, the medic and myself to organise stuff to do medcaps [medical civic action programs] in the villages. So he arranged with the village headman next to us about four K [kilometres] away to have a medcap

01:30 there and the village headman did and he proved it, and we went there and we did this medcap and he pulled teeth. He had never been a dentist or anything before, he pulled teeth and Corporal Pratt and I gave injections, penicillin and citrus injections of some kind and he had a line fifty metres long waiting for medical treatment. And that went on all of

02:00 that afternoon. And the next day we heard that the village headman was killed for allowing assistance to come in. and that village headman could speak a bit of English so he was an educated man., English wasn't a language spoken by the general populace over there, French yes, but not English. I actually had a few words to say to him or whatever

02:30 and he could speak a bit of English.

How did it feel when you found that information out?

I didn't like it at all. I won't go any further, but they way he was killed wasn't nice but I didn't feel good about that at all. Just like I didn't feel good about the incident on the 20th of July when I was supposed to be out there, I was supposed to be with the doctor.

03:00 We then went on another one further out, a good way out, it was another village and Victor Company was in that village, it was a New Zealand company. He arranged for us to go out there and found that they had an aid post in that village, it was a bigger village. And they were all lined up again, same arrangement. But the fellow in the aid post couldn't speak any English.

03:30 And the doc, I don't think he spoke another language and he asked Pratt and I if we spoke Vietnamese and I said, "No, I might be able to speak a bit of French." Because I learnt French at school, it wasn't one of my best subjects. And he said, "Well give him a go." And sure enough he could speak French. So with a bit of hand signs and a bit of French

04:00 we communicated, and so we got the people to do what we wanted .During that time the Victor Company medic was called upon to deliver a baby, which was an interesting thing. And I don't know if it was the first one he did or not, but there is no way in the world I would be attempting anything like that. The medic may have been trained to do it.

04:30 But the thing I didn't like was going back to the firebase from that. There was only three of us and the driver of the vehicle and him sitting in the back and I on the back manning the machine gun, it was just a jeep and it was getting pretty late. And I said to him, "You realise that it is getting close to dark?" and he said, "Yes we're on time." And I said

05:00 "We're on the wrong fork." And he said, "No, we're going down to D Company position, don't get alarmed. We will be back in time." But we weren't. Anyway we went to D Company position and we stopped the vehicle and he said, "They should be around about here." And they sure were, they were under the ground and he didn't see them, they popped out of the ground and told us to hold it there and he went over and had a yarn with

05:30 their captain or major whatever he was. And by this time the sun had already gone down and we still had a fair way to go and I was apprehensive about this. We had to turn the lights on and we were sitting ducks. But fortunately we got back.

06:00 **Was there standing orders in regard to driving at night time?**

I suppose there would be. There was no way that I would be switching the lights on on any vehicle after dark. I daresay someone spoke to him afterwards because we didn't do it again.

You were going to say the upshot, getting back in and the result of getting back in late?

06:30 I really don't know whether I should be saying any more. So no we didn't do that again, we didn't come in late again, we actually didn't do that activity again. Then we went into Nui Dat and I was transferred to A Company. I actually went

07:00 into company headquarters I think it was, where I had my own section . The CSM was in charge in there and the major, Major Belt. Major Belt he was mentioned in some sort of dispatches or something during the war, and the CSM 'Smile' Miles I was with him.

07:30 And I had my own section I remember, I didn't get along too well with the Lance Corporal that's all, everyone else fine. I can't even remember all of the fellows in the section. I remember some of them. Not all of them. But in the next operation I believe it was with A Company

08:00 we went into the next province, we were dropped in. Bien Hoa province. We were dropped into that province and I can remember, you wanted me to tell you about a contact. We knew the Viet Cong were around that particular day and the CSM had told me, the corporal had a map as well, he told me to be on the lookout and I just passed the word on that we

08:30 can expect contact. And that very morning we were coming down to a little creek and we were going to cross, see we had other platoons there as well, we had 3 Platoon and 2 Platoon and all of that stuff out of A Company but they were further over and further forward. And I saw out of the corner of my eye a movement

09:00 which I presumed was a soldier from another company. But as I went past I realised that he wasn't sweating, that was a different colour uniform, that was a Viet Cong. But by that time he had passed and the sig behind me saw him as well. We didn't exchange any firing and I don't think he saw us and obviously he didn't run into anybody else. But we crossed the creek and

09:30 it was shortly after we had lunch that we were moving on, actually following a small track around. There was a cleared section of say thirty metres in width and grass was already growing in it, it had been cleared earlier probably for a road or something by a land clearing team, and there were small saplings. Grass was probably that high and small saplings that high. And it was going down hill

10:00 but we were crossing it at an angle like so, and this little track we were following was going around in an arc and probably met up with this although I don't know because we heard AK47s [Kalashnikov rifles] in front of us. I believe it was 2 Platoon in front of us and they made contact with the enemy, at the same time behind us was 3 Platoon and they were in that open section that was going down and they had contact with the enemy as well. So

10:30 the CSM put us down, orders from the major probably and I was on the track facing down to 2 Platoon and so anyone who escaped up that track would be in my firing line and the rest of the section was spaced out so they were looking out and the 'tail end Charlie' would have been looking back to the direction we came from.

11:00 I had worked out what I was going to do, they would probably be running and I was thinking in my own mind I would wait until the second fellow came around the bend because it was about thirty metres in distance and I might be able to clean up two at once firing a magazine. So that's what I was looking at, a machine gun back further. The CSM came down to me and he says, "I have got to move you." It has started to

11:30 rain and all of that. And he says, "We want to guide 3 Platoon through to meet up with 2 Platoon." I didn't think it was a great idea and he said he didn't either, but you know where the orders come from. So we were on our way back when I spotted 3 Platoon they were already going the wrong direction, they were going down the cleared section and they were already too far past, they were

12:00 coming onto the track but I couldn't contact them because you couldn't call out you would get shot, so I said, I had with me a sig fellow a rifleman. Meantime Major Belt must have decided to bring the rest of the CHQ up and meet them as well but the AK opened up and the poor old forward scout was done and second scout wounded, they had just swapped positions.

12:30 And the corporal who was in that section jumped to the other side of the track and he missed out, and the fellow in front of him was a machine gunner and he copped a number of bullets from here down. But we just had to lie on the ground at the time. The guy who just opened up with the automatic AK47 and sprayed the place and we were on the

13:00 ground for twenty minutes, and during that twenty minutes the guy who was wounded up the front, second from the front, he was screaming the whole twenty minutes. When the order was given I went over and helped patch up the guy just in front of me, the machine gunner, with dressings

13:30 and whatever. But he had both legs broken and his legs had swollen out to double the size, internal bleeding and whatever. And I was going to give him the morphine but he wasn't saying anything, he was grey in the face so he was suffering from shock. But he wasn't saying anything so I didn't give him the morphine, but the medic gave the other fellow the morphine, the fellow who was screaming. And he first of all opened his boot up to have

14:00 a look at his foot that's where he was hit and it was just pulp. The ankle bone was facing the front so he just closed the boot up again and gave him some morphine not realising he had been hit in the stomach and the bloke didn't know he had been hit in the stomach either. So he got a bit of morphine to ease the pain. Front fellow was killed. He worked in the National Bank where Corinne worked, she didn't know

him but she knew of him, when he was in civvie life, he was a nasho.

14:30 And I had to help transport him to the helicopter. So that was a contact we actually had. We had to clear some forest first, we didn't let the helicopter drop in, I don't know why, on that cleared section, we actually had some forest cleared. And the helicopter came in but didn't come right down, they dropped the litter,

15:00 and we put the body in and the two wounded blokes in and they were transported away. So that was some time in September.

So in that twenty minutes when they initiated contact and a couple of blokes got hit, what happened in that twenty minutes?

Just laid on the ground.

They were firing?

No we were waiting for them, but they must have found another route. We had to stay there until it was safe, until we were given the order to move.

15:30 **So did any of your guys return fire at that initial contact?**

That wasn't the initial contact, we had contacts earlier.

No but the initial contact with your blokes?

No they didn't see them, they saw us first.

And so they broke contact themselves?

They fired and I don't believe our blokes got any shots off, I know the machine gunner didn't.

16:00 He was in 3 Platoon. So that was a first hand experience. And then we just went on we continued the operation and whatever. But Bien Hoa seemed to be a bit more lively than Phuoc Tuy I think. There were other times when I went back to Nui Dat I was called out,

16:30 selected people I think were called out. We had to go by truck up the highway, almost a company force. And we went up the highway, Highway 2 they called it, towards the province directly north. I have forgotten the name of it but all you need to do is look at a map. And we went close to the border, there was an ARVN outpost on the Phuoc Tuy side of the

17:00 border and apparently intelligence got word that this ARVN outpost was going to be attacked and so we had to go out during our twelve days in Nui Dat go up the highway, and it was pretty short notice. So the trucks dropped us prior to getting to the outpost, probably a kilometre or two on the southern side and then they turned around and

17:30 went back. And so we then went in a semicircle around and it was heavy bush and we were going through swamp and through this single file through the swamp, I don't know how many, we had bit quite a few. But circle and come back on the northern side so that we could be in position if

18:00 there was a contact with the ARVN outpost. It was a high building I remember. So we were in position to do something about it. But on the way, I had to carry a machine gun, the only time I carried one in Vietnam and my right foot just went phht out of sight. Leg right up to the crutch in

18:30 this flaming swamp and I had water up to here and I was holding the gun up here and I had this foot doubled up underneath me and I couldn't lever enough to get out. It was like a cork going into a wine bottle and you couldn't get the cork out. I couldn't get my leg out, it was just stuck in the hole and the hole closed on my leg. And it was sealed like a cork and I started to panic.

19:00 We were expecting to take fire and the trees were good cover for anyone and we were in the open and I am in the water, couldn't think of anything worse than getting done while you're stuck in the water. But I pulled rank on some of these guys walking past, told them to move themselves and get over here and get me out. And the first few fellows laughed they thought I was joking, but I wasn't joking.

19:30 In the end there were four blokes there trying to get me out of the hole and they couldn't budge my leg. One guy had me by the back of my pants there and another one had his arm under this leg and another pulling me by the front of my strides and eventually they did get me out, but it fit in like a cork. I said to them, "What the hell could that have been?" maybe a fence post or a tree that had been moved must have left a hole there or something.

20:00 Later on one bloke told me an unexploded bomb might have made the whole and didn't explode. Which could have been on the cards, but I felt sure that my feet didn't touch anything on the bottom. So that was an experience for me and I really packed it on that one. That was the only time I ever felt vulnerable.

Even opposed to being shot at?

20:30 Yeah that was the only time I really felt vulnerable and I couldn't do anything about it. I had no control over where I was going, I was stuck there and I had the firepower. If they can see you and you have got the fire power, you're marked. And these fellows were going to hold it for me while they were trying to get me out, no way in the world. So I kept hold of it.

21:00 **Despite knowing that you would draw fire you probably felt safer with it?**

My word. My word. And then when we got to our position it wasn't all that big where we were located. We were pretty well close to dark and rain already. So the powers- that-be were in control and they set down positions and so forth and they have got all of these gun sites out on the perimeter and we're

21:30 not spread out that far. So I actually dug myself a shell scrape, it only took me a few minutes. And the ground was soft and sandy and wet and we went to sleep. I was lying in water, soupy stinking stuff. But I was pleased, see if there was rockets come in you would have been glad to be there, they would have dug like hell. And during the night one bloke was returning from picket and he became

22:00 disorientated and he has come in through the next gun and of course he was given instructions, "Who goes there?" No answer, bang! They opened up with the machine gun. Well they reckon the tracer went between his legs and they missed they didn't hit him. H would have bought himself a Casket [lottery] ticket, I would say.

22:30 And we didn't have contact, the enemy didn't come in. They either got word of us being there or they didn't come in, so it was a wild goose chase.

What would you say was the worst part of your job?

The hardest part I found was being on constant alert on patrol thinking that you could be fired on at any time.

23:00 Some blokes just gave up, they just didn't care, but while you had a purpose you were still in it. But they were long days and tiresome and long nights and you were really tired and you got resupplied every three or four days with rations. I was in charge of what they call resupply

23:30 for my the headquarters platoon and blokes who needed to be resupplied, we were resupplied out bush. You didn't get resupplied back in camp. So if you had something that was wearing or worn or a new pair of boots or something, you asked for them and you got them out there. They were dropped in on the next resupply, which came with the rations by helicopter usually. If we were near a road, the truck might have brought them in;

24:00 or APC, something like that .So you carried four days' rations in your pack. The Australian rations were based on: one lot of rations had Irish stew and one lot had tuna and another had a tin of bully beef

24:30 in it, and another had little sausages. And then they had other things like a tube of condensed milk, and a little chocolate or something, and a few old dry biscuits. Tube of condensed milk and not much else. You had four water bottles and those four water bottles lasted you the three days.

25:00 And in hot tropical conditions you can imagine you had to really conserve water. I was there in the wet season but you had no way of getting the water. You put purification tablets in the water and occasionally we got American dry pack, which was lighter, a day's rations,

25:30 but you had to mix water with it, and so even though it tasted a bit better you used water to make it up. It had a little tin of preserved fruit in it as well, and a packet of cigarettes, four cigarettes or five, little packet with four I think cigarettes and they had various brands of them. And when you're on daily patrol you patrol so that you are on patrol for an hour

26:00 and then you stop for five minutes only. Wasn't time to brew up or anything. And you signalled people, Australians didn't make noise while patrolling, so they used signals. And the signal was: hold up your hand, five. You sat down on the track wherever and had a fag. And then you moved on again, or if you wanted someone to come to you, that's only the corporal

26:30 or higher rank the signal was, you would probably know that, "you come here, mate". You point and "come here". He didn't say anything. And so that was it. You didn't talk the whole time you were out there practically, and so it was good to get back into base and at four o'clock to be able to have a beer.

27:00 And that's where they started talking and did they talk. So having a beer was part of the comradeship. If you didn't go and have a beer or have something to drink, even something soft, you would go bananas if you kept to yourself.

So what were the sorts of things you talked about over a couple of beers?

27:30 Anything and everything. War type stuff and going on leave. Anything and everything. Just bullshit most of it. and that's what they wanted to talk about you know. You had a good camaraderie.

Did you smoke before you went over?

No, and I didn't smoke after I left either.

But you smoked there?

I just had a puff. I didn't really draw back or anything, it was just something to do.

28:00 I didn't get hooked with smoking and I didn't smoke afterwards.

Was it anything to do with calming the nerves?

Yeah, probably. It was a good way of relaxing, and having a booze was a way of relaxing too, back in Nui Dat. I used to do the picket

28:30 from ten til twelve, and that meant that I would do the last picket from four until six. So I really only slept for the four hours in Nui Dat, but I would go to the boozer from six to ten; we would have dinner somewhere in the time, about five or six o'clock, and then I would go to the boozer until ten o'clock. And then I would be on picket, I would go straight to the CHQ

29:00 CP, command post and I would do the first one on the telephone and then I would do the last one and wake everyone up in the morning at six.

Did you have any problems sleeping while you were there?

No, I sleep like a log with a gut full of whatever, and that's in the tent in Nui Dat. Out bush I would sleep

29:30 straight away but I could hear the bloke coming to wake me up for picket when he was twenty metres away. I would be awake and I would have my laces done up, because we didn't take our boots off. And I would be out from under the mosquito net and there before he got there. But when I went to wake people up

30:00 some of them were absolutely dead to the world, give them a kick and they still be asleep, wouldn't wake them up. They weren't as hyper, if you know what I mean.

Have you noticed your sleeping patterns since you have come back?

When I arrived back in Australia I immediately woke at six in the morning. I was used to being awake at six and this went on, I didn't have to have a clock or watch,

30:30 I can still do it actually. If I train myself to do it. Didn't need anything, it was all as regular as clockwork. Various things would wake me up. Do you want to get beyond the Vietnam stage?

When you were getting to the last patrol you talked about, how long did you have to go at that stage?

That wasn't the last patrol. I

31:00 came back to Nui Dat and had to go up on another patrol. Another operation, I came in prior to the conclusion of that operation and we had to have at least fourteen days in Nui Dat before we could come back to Australia because we had to have things like malaria stuff and various other things. And during that time I did a couple of tail patrols around Nui Dat. That meant you stayed out overnight

31:30 The trucks would drop you about three thousand metres out from the base and you would walk say a thousand metres to the location, had to read the map. And it would be my section, the ten men sort of thing. And we came across some half dug bunkers or something on one of those patrols, it was in the

32:00 Long Tan rubber [plantation]. The workers in the rubber and the bananas plantations worked there by day and then at five or six o'clock, I don't know what is curfew, and they can come back about eight o'clock in the morning and then they have to go to the villages. The curfew is overnight. And anything out overnight is fair game.

32:30 So nobody stayed there overnight, only Viet Cong. And so only enemy, not all called Viet Cong. But now if you ran across trouble you had to call in or you may have seen fit to call in artillery or mortars so you had to be able to read your map.

33:00 Some people didn't read it accurately and some people were exposed to danger that way. I do remember an occasion, it didn't happen in our company but it did happen in another company where someone called in, I won't be naming names, someone called in the [helicopter] gunships to the wrong grid reference. Apparently there was a river

33:30 and there was three tributaries to the river about a thousand metres apart, and they were located on one, they knew the enemy was on the next one and he has called them [the helicopters] in and given them this reference, here where they were. And a few of them got wounded from the gunships and of course from the gunships the fellows on the ground look the same as the enemy. They are hot and sweaty and their greens are all wet. So they wouldn't be able to tell whether they were enemy or not.

34:00 So I daresay there could have been a bit of strife over that. And one of the stretcher-bearers who attended those fellows was sent back to Australia because that cracked him up straight away. He used to be in my room at Townsville Lavarack barracks, good athlete and everything, but he went crackers

[crazy] and was sent back to Australia.

34:30 **So what happened when you found these shell scrapes in the Long Tan rubber?**

Called in mortars. And we posted one on one off, all night duty, instead of having two blokes on, there was five blokes off, one bloke on one bloke off, picket all night and I stayed awake all night. I wasn't going to have anything happen to me at that stage. And in the morning we walked out and we were

35:00 ten metres apart. (If Cruickshank finds out about this he might go back to that time). We were ten metres apart and the last bloke, 'tail end Charlie', I couldn't see him because I was three from the front. The truck had arrived and just as the truck arrived the workers for the day had arrived, the local

35:30 population, and they started jabbering. I thought "What they hell are they going on about?" I couldn't understand them and I said, "Get on the truck." To these blokes and I looked over and sure enough the last bloke had used his machete and whipped off a bunch of bananas that stood from there to the floor and they were just beautifully starting to ripen. And I said, "Let them there, you stupid bugger." And he said, "No way in the world." and I said, "Well get on this bloody truck as fast as you can" and he got on we off. And

36:00 these workers they must have complained to the base because I got a report that I might have had to report to somewhere or other. And they said, "You were on patrol that night, did you notice anything with regards to anyone taking a bunch of bananas?" and I said, "No."

36:30 That saves a lot of trouble and he said, "All right we just had a complaint they thought someone had knocked off a bunch of bananas or something from the plantation." And this guy had them up in his tent and they were feasting on them up there for the next few days.

So were you counting down the days?

Yeah we counted the days. I can see the letters there, I had numbered the days., This is the letters to my parents, I won't tell you what happened to the letters to my wife,

37:00 she might be able to tell you. Before my mother died she gave me those letters, so I just went through them last night actually and sure enough it gave me the locations where I might have been and my actions, it was in those letters, but not everything.

How important was it to have regular contact?

Very important.

37:30 From reading the letters I could gather that it was very important to me. Because I mentioned at one stage that I might have received fifteen or twenty letters from different people or whatever, because it might have been three or four days between receiving the letters and I understand Corinne wrote a letter every day, or twice a day to me.

38:00 I have got those letters, but she hasn't got the ones that I wrote to her. I probably wrote a letter every three days or so to Corinne, if I could. When you're out in the bush you wrote one. It was a bit harder on patrol than it was in the firebase, it was easy enough in a firebase but out on patrol was difficult. You weren't allowed to take a camera out with you when you went bush, but I managed to take a camera with me in the Long Hais

38:30 so I have got a few photos in the Long Hais, just around the firebase, they weren't from outside the firebase.

What sort of interaction did you have with the ARVN?

None, very little. Very little interaction for me personally. We had a Vietnamese interpreter with the battalion, we might have had more than one, and some of our blokes

39:00 were interpreters. I almost had the opportunity to do the course myself, when I was in Townsville they would have sent me away for three months to Point Cook or something in Victoria but I was just pipped out. I was one of the selected three and on the interview one of the other blokes got it so I was one off getting it. I would have

39:30 liked to have learnt Vietnamese and been able to speak it over there.

What about Americans, did you have much to do with them?

Oh yes we acted as protection for an American land clearing team for two weeks during one of our operations, and they were the lowest of the low these blokes. They were so noisy in their fire support base, they were probably the blokes

40:00 who didn't want to be soldiers. They were shockers, that's all I can say, I am not saying anymore. And during that time I was housed with this Vietnamese bloke, interpreter. And I said to him, he had a beautiful accent Australian accent, if you weren't looking at him you would think he was Australian. He was obviously taught English

- 40:30 by an Australian and he could speak French with equal ability. And I said to him, this is after I had been to the first aid base, and I said, "Would you speak French only to me while we are out here?" and he said, "Yeah I will oblige." And you know that little hound did not speak English to me once, not even
- 41:00 when I said, "No you can give it up now, speak English. He did not speak English to me the whole time we were out there, but I did learn something from him you know.
- 41:11 End of tape

Tape 9

- 00:30 **When you are caught in a situation like the one you describe in Bien Hoa, what is the process for the dust off? [helicopter airlift]**
- Well the powers who be will call the 'dust off' in.
- Whose job is it?**
- Well the person in charge, and the person in charge there would have been the
- 01:00 company major. Major Belt. Now if it wasn't him it would be one of his officers who would be in charge of the platoon and they have a rank of lieutenant or second lieutenant, that's via the signallers, the sig set.
- 01:30 **So with your role as the stretcher-bearer/ medical assistant, what's your role?**
- What I did in that process was help patch up one of the wounded and I also carried one of them to the chopper, the body.
- How difficult is it to do that sort of work when you are potentially still in the line of fire like that?**
- 02:00 Well the area was regarded as been made safe but you never know what's around, but you don't think about them. My thoughts were about getting the guys on the chopper and I daresay that's the thoughts of the other fellows too.
- Did you have a medico doctor there with you on that?**
- No doctor on that occasion,
- 02:30 doctor would be in the firebase, he wouldn't be on patrol.
- Was there a medic with you?**
- Yes the fellow who was with me, we lived together in Nui Dat the same tent. Corporal Lorent was his name.
- So between the two of you, is the equipment you're carrying adequate for people that badly injured?**
- Adequate.
- 03:00 On him he had plasma and tubes and whatever; I didn't carry those. I wasn't trained in the use of those. He had that sort of stuff, and other stuff that I didn't have. I just had the basics.
- What sort of time lapse is there in that instance from when those men are injured to when the helicopter arrived to evacuate?**
- 03:30 Well we were on the ground for twenty minutes; but after that within half an hour we would have them on the helicopter, place cleared for the helicopter and he dropped the thing down but he didn't have to land, he stayed about the tree tops and the litter was dropped down.
- How was that land cleared?**
- 04:00 The Pioneers must have been with them. They would have had the light stuff cleared with machetes, but any thick saplings would have been cleared with something else that the tracker team would have had.
- 04:30 **So in circumstances like that where men are injured and you know you're on limited time an obviously it is urgent, what sort of conversations are happening?**
- Very little, you don't talk, unless it is orders or instructions given. We kept noise to a minimum.
- And with being a stretcher-bearers, what actually happened in terms of requiring a stretcher?**
- 05:00 Oh that's easy. Everybody carries what they call a sleeping mattress, it is just a bit of plastic. If they

want to lie on something more comfortable than the ground, they can blow those things up in about ten seconds, they shove them into the three little pockets on this stretcher which is about that wide and it has got stitched

05:30 pockets, and these little things fit in there and you just blow it up by your mouth and it is air inside. Now for the stretcher you just use the empty type mattress without the three little things, you shove a sapling down the two outside ones and you put a person

06:00 you're carrying in there. The sapling goes through the ends and you have got four blokes, one on each end of the sapling.

And how many of the injured men on that day would you have had to get stretchers for?

Three.

Three separate stretchers?

Three, if they don't require a stretcher you can put them in without using a stretcher, but you had the fellow who was killed and the two injured.

06:30 **You were talking about the conditions being there in the wet season, is that another factor that contributes to that process being difficult?**

If it is raining, you could set your watch by the time it was going to rain over there in the wet season, probably two o'clock in the afternoon or a little later and it would come down, some days heavy downpours, other days

07:00 not so much, but every day it would rain.

So the helicopter would come over, is that Australian or American?

Either.

And is it a "jungle penetrator," is that another name for the litter they dropped down?

No I have never heard that term used before.

So if they drop the litter down, do they take all three stretchers out at once?

07:30 No there is one pulled up at a time, they could be, it depends what they can fit in one chopper, but usually there is more than one, if you had three.

So on that day was there more than one?

Yeah there was more than one. I can't remember if they had two, four, what.

So on that day the man you took out to the chopper was he the one that was killed?

The one I took was killed, yeah.

08:00 **How gruesome a task is that to have to take out?**

Particular in this instance. It was particularly gruesome, he had been shot in the heart but he had another wound that I didn't know about. I am not elaborating at this point. And

08:30 you can live with the memory for a long time. You live with that memory for a long time. It won't go away. And so you just, he just gets medevaced and you have to get on with what you're doing.

Once they are medevaced, do you hear much?

Never heard a thing about him until I saw something in the paper twenty years later, a list of people who were

09:00 killed in Vietnam or something and I remembered his name, I never knew him but I remembered his name. I remember the names of all three of those fellows. I knew one of them, I knew the guy who was the scout who was injured, he used to work in the officers' mess at base and back in Townsville,

09:30 serve drinks or whatever. And he I don't think he was out bush a lot, I think he still had duties in the officers mess in Nui Dat but for some reason or other he was out as a scout on that operation.

When you said you were writing letters counting down the days, what were the last two or three days like?

10:00 They were pretty easy and we looked forward to the end of the two or three days but I wasn't out bush I was in Nui Dat so I knew I was right.

Do you remember the last night before you left?

No I don't. I do remember the plane trip home. The plane was full and

- 10:30 it was a 747 or something like that and it flew non stop from Saigon to Sydney. We had to dress in civilian clothes and we had to keep a low profile, we were told to do that in Sydney because this was the time when these moratoriums were around and we were told not to get out on the streets and play up although we did go for a
- 11:00 wander, but we didn't make it known we were servicemen, that was in Sydney. And then next morning we flew to Brisbane in civilian clothes again. I got to the airport and because we went early we didn't take home as much as others would take home. Like they would have their trunks as they were coming back on the Sydney they would keep
- 11:30 those as a keepsake and lots of stuff in them. All I had was a bag
- Duffle bag?**
- Yes a duffle bag, and I had everything in that.
- So you flew back in. How long was it before you got to see your family?**
- Oh the next day. I went to Brisbane and caught a train to Ipswich
- 12:00 and I went to see the car people in Ipswich and actually bought a car, didn't take it with me, I ordered it. Brand new one because the amount of money I had saved while I was in the army was enough to buy a brand new car, which was a Holden Kingswood. And then I hitchhiked to Boonah and I arrived home a couple of days before I told them I was coming home.
- 12:30 Nobody knew I was coming home.
- What was that like?**
- Oh it was good. So I did have quite a time off, I had accrued a fair bit of leave, when I was at Townsville I had to go back early before the rest of battalion. I was the only stretcher-bearer or medic back in base when I went to Townsville and it so happened that I
- 13:00 had to do duty in the RAP with no doctor or medic. And do you know, in the whole ten months I was there that was the only night something happened. There was a car accident at the front gate and the guard gate came and got me at half past ten, I was just about ready to get into bed, guard car came and got me told me to get some equipment and get out, there had been an accident at the gate. I didn't realise how bad
- 13:30 the accident was. There was a guy riding a motorbike and two army blokes in an old FJ Holden coming into the base and this guy was coming from the university up the road which was a fairly new university at the time, Cook University. And he had collided with the FJ. Seventeen years old, collided with the FJ and when I got there I looked at the two guys and they were
- 14:00 unconscious and the FJ was upside down in a ditch and I just asked the others to get them on their sides and make sure their tongues were right or whatever. And I went over to have a look at this bloke and he has only got one leg, his leg has been cut off here. And his backside is all missing, he hit the bitumen on his backside. He was still conscious. And couldn't find his boot and the missing part of the leg
- 14:30 in the dark. Other blokes were looking for it and I got burn dressing out and things to try and stop the bleeding from the leg. It was probably more gruesome than a war wound. By that time a civilian ambulance had arrived, and thank Christ for that.
- 15:00 That guy died nine days later. He had complications set in, and he died.
- How is it different seeing something gruesome like that here in Australia to seeing it in the field?**
- None. That was just a bad one that one. That accident, he was just as mangled as those guys would be, if not more.
- 15:30 **After seeing that you went to Vietnam?**
- I thought about that a lot. That was four months before I went to Vietnam, or three and a half months. I have never forgotten that.
- Would you have had an option not to be a stretcher-bearer?**
- Not really. I didn't pursue anything, not to be a stretcher-bearer. The other guys see
- 16:00 the same as stretcher-bearers, it is really no different except that you may have to attend some of them. I didn't have to attend to any gruesome things, only that one incident.
- So coming back to Australia, you have gone to see the family and had some leave, how much time did you have left before you were demobbed? [Demobilised - discharged from service]**
- 16:30 I had about a month's leave and then I had to go back to Enoggera for two or three weeks and I just had

menial tasks to do. There was a section and I was corporal; I was duty corporal a couple of times in the orderly room at night time. Apart from that we would have a parade in the morning and I would set the guys some tasks to do knowing perfectly well when I pissed off they would piss off.

- 17:00 And so as soon as I gave them the tasks to do, by rights we should have had another parade in the afternoon but I never bothered about it and nobody ever checked. So I would come back for the next parade the next morning at eight o'clock. I would just go to the coast, that's where Corinne was, I would stay the night down there and drive back from the coast.

So when you were finally demobbed, was it a huge sense of relief?

Yeah I was

- 17:30 probably foolish. I had just a general medical, I didn't tell them about anything, maybe I should have told them about more than I did. I probably regret it today because the only things that went on my medical records were just those things that they picked up, about hearing and whatever.

- 18:00 But I should have told them about my back, which I didn't do. If I had told them and had to have x-rays or whatever it would have meant I had to stay there another couple of days. I wasn't going to do that.

And you ended up quickly back into teaching?

Yeah after getting out the following Monday or Tuesday I

- 18:30 started school at Boonah. But I didn't have a class. I was put on things like stocktaking and things like that. Before the end of the week I had received a call from East Ipswich and I came down to East Ipswich and started work there on a class and I got a flat down here.

How hard was it to settle back into civilian life?

I thought it was relatively easy,

- 19:00 I thought to myself it was easy, but really it wasn't. There was niggling things in the back of my mind. I kept myself occupied by taking sporting teams in my own time sort of thing. I put a lot of time and effort into cricket coaching and also

- 19:30 rugby league and hit the grog fairly heavily and around the town with various people. My favourite watering hole was the Prince Alfred Hotel and I would go there a lot and play darts at night time, in the dart competition. On some nights of the week, later on I got into playing squash at night time,

- 20:00 after a couple of years that is. I had a back problem and I found I couldn't do those things to the fullest extent. Cricket I continued, I was a cricketer before I went into the army and I continued to play cricket for one of the local clubs and also a bit of representative cricket. But I found after some years bowling

- 20:30 affected my back and I gave the bowling away to just concentrate on batting; but batting, even if I stayed at the crease a long time, the bent over position affected my lower back as well. So I did end up giving up cricket in the end and shortly after that I had what they call a disc prolapse or something and all of the

- 21:00 discs were bulged on the left hand side. I had big trouble then, hospital for two weeks in a private hospital. And it all stemmed from a little incident in Vietnam when I hopped off this chopper [helicopter]. It was hovering over a grassy area and we were going out on operation, we weren't coming back we were going out.

- 21:30 So I just jumped out, but when you have got thirty-eight to forty kilograms on your back and in your hands, if you are jumping down from the height of that table or a bit higher, it is quite a bump when you hit the ground and for some reason I always used to point my toes, you're told to do that, and that takes most of your

- 22:00 fall. The grass must have been a little longer than I thought and I ended up hitting the ground on my heels, so I have done a disc in my back and I had problems staying out there, but I stayed out there.

Apart from the physical effect of being out there, you have been diagnosed

- 22:30 **with PTSD?**

Only recently.

How did that happen?

I probably had some form of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] all along the because I was basically happy go lucky fellow and not ruffled by much. But I

- 23:00 found as years went by I was getting more ruffled [upset] and little things would annoy me, there were incidents that happened in my life, that stirred these things up and I got a bit hard to live with, so people say. And in later life, say from the 90s on, it became worse when I found I

- 23:30 couldn't coach teams anymore and things like that because of my back, I thought my back and hip problems that were causing me to get frustrated in the head, and I didn't think it was anything else. I thought it was those things that caused me frustration.
- 24:00 I probably had some affects from a car accident I had in the early 90s, even the car accident could have been the result of what my head was telling me. Then again later on one of my sons became involved with, you know the things they
- 24:30 use today, they call it drugs, he was into that and I didn't really know what to do. So that caused me to get worse I think and I still didn't realise I had anything as a result of those things -
- 25:00 as a result of maybe service and seeing those things and say trauma. And in the end Corinne has got me to go along to the psychologist, and he reckons I probably have PTSD after being to him for about ten weeks
- 25:30 ten different sessions and he suggested I go to the psych [psychiatrist]. Corinne suggested I was "crackers" [crazy] long before this. So eventually I allowed Corinne to make an appointment for me, she wanted me to go for a long time, I didn't want to go and see the psyche, I told her to forget about it, but eventually I did.
- 26:00 And I had a number of visits to the psyche and she reckons I had severe PTSD; this is last year sometime, early last year. But I know I had something leading up to that because my state of mind wasn't really good. I am not going to go into describing it all.
- 26:30 I continued to go to her and she put me onto anti-depressant tablets, which I still take. And I ended up giving up work, I was actually on a contract at the time and I gave that up and I cancelled another contract that was
- 27:00 organised for me, I cancelled that one and I have since gone to DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs].

How often over the years would you say you have thought about Vietnam?

Things were in the back of my mind but I tried to avoid them. I didn't go to the RSL or anything. I did actually join the RSL when I first got out but I had an

- 27:30 altercation with some old fogie and I told him he could shove his RSL and I didn't go back to the RSL for thirty years.

Can I ask what that altercation was?

Yeah. We used to have meeting in the RSL as teachers, this is the one in town in Ipswich and I

- 28:00 thought I will join the RSL since I am an ex-serviceman and I joined it and I was there with a mate of mine one day and there were about three blokes down the end of the bar. This wasn't a very popular RSL, big RSL opposite the civic centre and since many years ago
- 28:30 they stopped serving grog there and they have the one at North Ipswich. But at that time it was the RSL and they would serve grog to old warriors, and I went in with this bloke and I was sitting down and this guy not in a pleasant way says, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "I am a veteran. I am having a beer just like you."
- 29:00 And he sort of said, "What are you a veteran of?" and I said, "Vietnam." and he then belittled it and said something nasty about it and that's
- 29:30 when I told him he could shove his RSL and I never went back. But I did go back to this one at North Ipswich about five years ago with an organization I joined in civilian life. It had nothing really to do with the RSL, we just raised money to further junior sports in the town and since we got kicked
- 30:00 out of the hotel we used to do it in, because they became a club, we then approached the RSL and they were happy to have us on member nights, Wednesday night. So we do our raffles there. And that's when I joined the RSL again then.

Generally how were you received when you came home?

Received okay in my town, a country town,

- 30:30 but I wasn't there long ,we didn't really speak much about it. I never really said anything much about my service until recent years.

Looking back on your war service what does it mean to you?

I feel proud of it. I think there is a different attitude today then there was when people returned

- 31:00 from Vietnam in the late 60s an early 70s. There might have been a good attitude towards them early in the piece but it got a little worse as time went on with these moratoriums that were happening in Sydney especially, and Melbourne. And the bigger cities, where they wanted to bring the soldiers home.

Of course the government changed in 72 and the Labor party got in and they did bring the

31:30 soldiers home. Well you can be either against that or for it. I suppose some people were happy that Australians were involved, most people were happy that Australia was involved. Happy to be involved to start with, with the then government

32:00 convinced them there was a good cause. I wasn't convinced. But the catch cry was "Baby killers". With things like My Lai and things like that they got bad publicity.

32:30 First of all the bad publicity started in America and then it spread to Australia and the soldiers weren't given the right treatment when they returned, I don't think.

So for you personally looking back, what are you most proud of about your service?

I didn't want to go in the army to start with, but once I was there, I was proud when I went to Vietnam. If I hadn't have gone to Vietnam my service wouldn't have meant much to me.

33:00 I was proud of doing that service, that's just within me. And I am actually proud of having been an infantry person in an infantry battalion. Even though infantry were called "grunts" over there, walking around all of the time,

33:30 but I liked that word, it meant something to me.

What were your feelings when Saigon fell?

I thought, "well we didn't lose the war", I never believed we ever did. But history will say that we did. But I don't believe we lost anything.

34:00 History will say that we did because the North Vietnamese achieved their goal.

Do you have any regrets from your service?

Probably yes. Only regret some of these guys who have the problems and the guys who were wounded

34:30 and killed and whatever, but mine for me I don't regret doing it. Even though I originally thought we shouldn't have been there, I haven't changed my mind, but that was it.

We hear conflicting stories, we hear that no national servicemen had to

35:00 **go to Vietnam if they didn't want to ?**

Bullshit. To get out of going to Vietnam you would have had to be really strong and persistent and made the papers and it would have been a big hassle. That's unbelievable for them to say that, I don't reckon that's right.

35:30 **We hear conflicting stories, so I wanted to hear your thoughts.**

You more or less had to be a conscientious objector [pacifist]. And being a contentious objector is not easy.

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

This last Anzac Day was the first time I marched in a parade. I have been invited to the one at Boonah.

36:00 Once before and I went but they didn't march because it was raining. And what do I think about? Well I did march in the Long Tan thing last year too. I think about the blokes, that's what I think about every night I got to the RSL [club] I go once or twice a week to the RSL

36:30 and I am always there when they play the Ode [nightly tribute] so I think about the same thing all of the time.

Does Anzac Day and Vietnam Veterans' Day or Long Tan Day, have different significance for you?

No I think about the same thing. I think about my service more than I do about Anzac Day itself. But I did go along to a couple of schools this year as

37:00 an invited person . Went to my old school at North Ipswich and I went to another private school, Saint Augustin's down the road a bit.

What does it mean to you to see the younger generation embracing Anzac Day?

I think its good, it's marvellous and I told them that at St. Augustin's.

37:30 **If you were to think of this archive as a time capsule that many future generations of Australia will get to see, what is it that you would like them to know about Vietnam?**

I would like them to know that it was a fairly fruitless in a way, experience for

- 38:00 a lot of people that were there. A lot of us soldiers didn't know, and I am sure the people in the hierarchy in control of the situation didn't know much more. Governments send you to these places, but you have your duty to respond to the government.
- 38:30 The government in power is the one that people put there. And while nearly half of the people might not have voted for the government, the majority did. They put them there and it is the government's decision. Now if they are put out in the future then the people don't agree with that decision, they have reversed that decision. It is possible it was because of that it might have been for some other reason.
- 39:00 But what is our democracy about? It is about making a better life for us to live in, a better life for our future generations to live in, and if our future generations can realise that, well they are going to have a good time.

Do you have any final thoughts or messages for the archive?

- 39:30 Well I would just like to say that war is a fruitless thing, a non-winnable thing. It has been going on through the ages but some people achieve their material, political, economic, gains through wars. And I can only say today this war in Iraq in my belief, okay we
- 40:00 have an alliance with America, but I can only say my personal thoughts for being there is for economic reasons. More than for reasons of terrorism. But I am not disproving of them being there. I am saying yes, we are in there for the economics of it.

Okay.

- 40:30 **INTERVIEW ENDS**